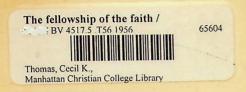
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# THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAITH



# T. H. JOHNSON MEMORIAL LECTURES

March 1-3, 1955

MANHATTAN BIBLE COLLEGE



PRESENTED BY

C. K. THOMAS



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# THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAITH

T. H. Johnson Memorial Lectures

Manhattan Bible College

March 1 - 3, 1955

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Manhattan Bible College Alumni Association

Manhattan, Kansas

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#### PREFACE

The content of this work was delivered as the T. H. Johnson

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There are many to whom the author wishes to express his gratitude.

First of all, it is to the Alumni Association of Manhattan Bible College for the opportunity to deliver the lectures.

Credit has been given in the notes to those from whom material has been derived directly. There is in the work, however, no claim to originality. The attempt has rather been to present what seems to the author some of the great Biblical ideas involved in the fellowship of the faith which God has made possible through Christ. In doing this, he is indebted to many. Some of the sources are teachers from whom he has learned, and others are books and articles which he has read. Mainly the thought has been derived from a study of the text of the Scriptures. The material derived from these many sources has become so thoroughly integrated into the author's thinking, that the original source from which it was derived is no longer distinguishable.

The Scripture quotations in the work are from the Revised Standard Version of the Scripture. The author wishes also to express his indebted—ness to Mrs. Arthur Rost who has so carefully and efficiently prepared the typescript for the work.

C. K. Thomas College of the Bible, Phillips University Enid, Oklahoma March 4, 1955



#### THIS, OUR FELLOWSHIP

Christians by many small groups and at various intervals through the centuries have been seeking to recapture the genius of the first century Church. There, its vitality permeated the lives of its people. Evangelism and mission were the imperatives of its existence. There was a common bond which held Christians across the land in a union of love and devotion. There were, of course, instances where Christians did not fully fit into this pattern, but even in the face of this problem and of many variations of the Church's thought, there was an underlying genius which made it one.

The best word which we have to describe this genius is the word "fellowship." This, along with its synonoym, "communion, "is often used in the New Testament. It is to the definition and elaboration of this genius and this term that we set ourselves in this series of studies. In this first chapter we shall seek to define and illustrate the meaning of the word fellowship. This must become the basis of all we shall say hereafter. In the second chapter we shall examine the way in which God has opened up to man the possibility of this fellowship. In the third chapter we shall discuss the means by which man responds and enters into this fellowship. In the following study we shall discuss the nature of this fellowship as it is realized within the community of believers. In the concluding study, we shall attempt to view this fellowship in the light of our eternal hope. If we are successful in discovering the Biblical ideas and their applications

ing our ownmind at least, in what it would mean to recapture the genius of this fellowship which so thoroughly transformed everyone who caught its spirit. It thus becomes clear that the purpose of our studies will be two-fole. The first aim will be to discover and clarify the nature of this fellowship as it existed during the first century. The second aim, which must be the ultimate goal of the study, is to enable us to recapture that fellowship so that we may embody it in our contemporary society. If we can do this, our investigation will have been worth while.

#### I. The Definition of the term

#### a. The difficulties of definition.

When we come to define such a term as "fellowship" we are confronted with several difficulties. The first is that we are dealing with not one, but several related words. For example, the same Greek word is sometimes translated as communion and sometimes as fellowship. Or, the term will appear as the noun fellowship which may have a variety of meanings, or as an adjective meaning common or belonging to several. Still again it may be an adverb to describe an action and may be translated commonly or together. Yet again it may appear in the form of a personal noun translated as partner, fellow or companion. All of this complexity may, at the outset, seem to be both confusing and useless, but, in reality, it gives us a hint beforehand, of the richness of the idea with which we are to deal.

A second difficulty which we encounter is that we are investigating a situation some two thousand years old. We must understand this idea as the people of the first century understood it. We must feel ourselves once again a part of the little struggling community of Christians in Colossae of Philippi, or Antioch, or elsewhere and in some way understand the bond of fellowship which they knew joined them as brothers and sisters to every other Christian across the earth. We must stand in market-places of the ancient world and hear Peter, and Paul, and others preach the Gospel of the crucified and risen Lord. We must feel the awful loneliness of persecuted people whose only hope was fellowship with God and with their fellow Christians far away. Furthermore we must recapture the hope that burned in their heart and made them "turn the world upside down." In short, only as we can stand where they stood, feel as they felt, and see as they saw, can we recapture this genius that gave the church its dynamic. It is a very difficult task, but it is worth the effort.

The third difficulty we encounter in understanding the term <u>fellowship</u> is that of taking the idea as it was understood two thousand years ago, and giving it meaning in our own world today. What can <u>fellowship</u> mean in a world divided between communism and freedom, with many Christians behind the iron or the bamboo curtain? What can fellowship mean in an

America with its Christians divided into denominations who cannot have the free exchange of members, who cannot adequately worship together, or cannot sit together at the Lord's table? Furthermore, what can this fellowship mean in a brotherhood torn by strife and misunderstanding and suspicion when we, of all people, have proposed to recapture this genius, to restore the Church to its New Testament purity, and to unite the people of God into one even as our Lord prayed for their unity? It is no small task which we undertake, but if we are even partially successful, we shall have been greatly profited.

#### b. The definition of the Greek words involved.

As we, then, set out on this task of definition, let us first turn to the Greek words, found so frequently in the New Testament. We cannot be satisfied to examine the New Testament alone, however, for it was written in the language of the people, and we will understand the words only as they were understood in the common language of the day. Furthermore, we must remember that the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, was the Bible of many of the people of the first century. This, too, we must examine to determine the meaning of its words. To each of these sources we must turn for an understanding of each idea.

## (1) The definition of the noun koinonia.

The basic idea for our study is embodied in the noun

kcinonia. This noun is used very frequently in the Greek Old Testamentand even more frequently in the Greek New Testament. It has as its fundamental idea the thought of a common sharing of, or in, something. An unusual use of the word is found in the Greek Old Testament in Lev. 6:2 where it is translated as surety, bargain or pledge. The reference is to something held in common by two people to bind an obligation between them. The idea apparently is both of them own it or at least they share in it so long as it remains the bond of their agreement.

In the popular language of the day which has been preserved lefor us in a fragment of papyrus, the word is sometimes used to describe the intimate companionship of marriage as a fellowship or communion between husband and wife. Sometimes also it is used to describe a partnership in business as in the case of two men who are partners in the renting of a lake in 2 proceeds of which they share in a certain proportion.

In the New Testament the word is much more frequent. It is once used in a very enlightening negative aspect in II Cor. 6:14 where Paul makes a statement that light can have no companionship or fellowship with darkness. This statement is made both as an illustration and a proof that a believer should not marry an unbeliever. This indicates quite vividly that we can have no such thing as koinonia or fellowship unless there

is something in common which the various parties share.

There is a good number of passages in the New Testament in which the word refers to a sharing in things possessed in common. In Acts 2:42 for example, it is said that the Church continued in the fellowship. This is frequently interpreted to mean the sharing of possessions either by way of an offering or as in Acts 2:44, 45 where it is said that they had all things common. We need not decide between these two interpretations at this point. The important thing is to see that the word fellowship refers to something which was shared among all those who believed. In Romans 15:26 and II Cor. 8:4 the word koinonia or fellowship, is used to refer to an offering which is taken from one group of Christians to be given to another group of Christians to alleviate their need. Thus, it is indicated that as the Gentiles have had a share in the spiritual things of the Jewish Christians so now the Jewish Chrisitnas are worthy of receiving the material things from the Gentile Christians. Here the word fellowship becomes specifically a name for an offering of money which is shared in by various Christians.

Another use of the word is that found in Philippians 3:10 in which Paul speaks of having fellowship in sufferings as thoughhe shared these sufferings along with Christ. While the expression is not frequently used, a similar idea seems to appear more or less frequently throughout the New Testament.

A use of the word koinonia which is fairly distinct from these is that in which there is a community made possible by certain individuals sharing something together. There is, for example, the sharing in the Gospel in Philip. 1:5 or a sharing in the fiath in Philemon 6 or I John 1:3. This use of koinonia leads us to the conclusion, which is verified by an examination of the New Testament, that the word in its highest usage refers to a religious fellowship or communion with other persons. By this we mean that it is not only sharing of things, but it is a union of the individuals who share such things. We have for example the possibility of fellowship with Christ (I Cor. 1:9). Again in Paul's benediction at the close of Second Corinthians (13:13) he prays for the communion or the fellowship with the Holy Spirit (see also Philip. 2:1). This fellowship may also be with other Christians (II Cor. 9:13). This is constantly implied throughout the New Testament. As we shall see later in our study, the Church is a fellowship of those who believe. Interestingly enought, this fellowship is symbolized in the right hand of fellowship as in Gal. 2:9. It becomes emobdied most clearly in the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 10:16). We need not pursue these ideas further becuase they will become much clearer in our later study.

A further matter of importance is that this fellowship is always based upon a condition. There are certain elements

which must be present before there can be such a thing as a koinonia or fellowship. For example in I John 1:3 the writer states that our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, but he implies that this fellowship is not possible without a knowledge of him who is the living Word. In I John 1: 6 we are told that, as Christians, we have fellowship with God, but that this fellowship definitely is conditioned upon our walking in the light, or doing the truth. John states here that he who does not walk in the light has no such fellowship. He who does walk in the light has fellowship with every other Christian, in which case the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. Here then is the implication of a conditioned community or fellowship. Those who are aware of this divine Son and who walk in the light and share the common faith are partakers together in the forgiveness of sins and, we may add from our knowledge of the general scope of the passage, we are likewise partakers in the salvation which he brings to us.

# (2) The use of words related to koinonia.

The usage of other members of the same family of words presents us with very much the same idea. This is true of the adjective koinos. This means common or belonging to all. It is used, for example, in one papyrus document of the common life of a husband and wife. In general it refers to anything that is shared by the members of a group. A frequent use of

this word is a designation of that which is common, or possibly unclean, or even profane as opposed to that which is holy. The fact that a thing belongs to everyone and thus is common property means that it is not separate or sacred. It is from this derived meaning that the term unclean, or profane is developed. For example, Peter uses the term to refer to food in Acts 10:14 and elsewhere as unclean. Or in Heb. 10:29 the person who breaks his vov as a Christian is described as profaning, or as the older version read it, counting the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified common or unholy thing. In the better sense of the word it refers to that which is the common possession of the whole group. We find it, for example, used in the Wisdom of Sirach (50:17) and II Macc. (9:26) to refer to something which is held in common as over against that which is possessed individually. In the Wisdom of Solomon (7:3) it is used to refer to the common air, that is the air which is breathed by everyone. In the New Testament it is used especially to refer to property which is held in common. The so-called communal use of property in the Jerusalem Church referred to in Acts 2:44 and 4:32 is described by this adjective koinos or common. A use which is more striking than this is found in Titus 1:4 where Paul reminds Titus of our common faith, or in Jude 3 where Jude writes concerning our common salvation.

The verb which belongs to this family carries essentially

the same meaning. The verb koinoneo is especially enlightening because it is even more emphatic in its emphasis upon joining together or sharing in some possession or effort. For example, in II Chron. 20:35 Jehoshaphat is said to have joined himself in a common effort with Ahaziah. In Job 34:8 it is used of those who associate themselves together for evil purposes. In Eccl. 9:4 a person who shares in our common humanity is described as joined with all the living.

In the New Testament the verb is very common and is translated, to have fellowship or communion with someone or something. In Romans 12:13, 15:27 it is a sharing in the needs of the saints. So also the Philippian Christians had fellowship or shared in their possession with Paul (Phil. 4:15). In Gal. 6:6 the person who is instructed is told to communicate, or to share, or have fellowship with the one who instructs him.

There is a personal noun koinon which is often used to refer to the individuals who participate in such sharing. Sometimes it refers to companions in evil things as in Isaiah 1:23 and Proverbs 28:24. It may refer to a close friend without stating whether the relationship is good or bad (Wisdom of Sirach 6:10). It may refer to partners in business as, for example, Peter, Andrew and the sons of Zebedee in Luke 5:10. This use is found also in a papyrus of a little later period.

A matter which is more significant for us, is that these

companions or fellows as they might be called are frequently companions in actions. An example of this is the statement of the Pharisees as quoted by Jesus in Matthew 23:30 where it is declared that they would not have been companions of their fathers or partakers with them in the stoning of the prophets, had they lived in their day. There are many other senses in which this is used. In I Cor. 10:18 Paul refers to the priests who are partners at the altar. Here he is referring to the Jewish priests who had shared the responsibilities, and possibly the food, from the altar. In I Cor. 10:20 he uses the same word where it apparently applies to the sharing in the actions of pagan priests.

There is a number of uses in which the word companion or fellow has a much higher implication. In I Peter 5:1 Peter declares that he is a partaker of or a sharer in the office of elder, that is he is a fellow elder with the elders to whom he writes. There is again the possibility of being companions in the suffering of other Christians as in Heb. 10:33, II Cor. 1:7. Likewise there are partners or fellows in the work of the Gospel such as Titus, (II Cor. 8:23) or Philemon (Philemon 17). Probably the most exalted use of all is that statement in II Peter 1:4 in which it is asserted that we are partners or partakers in the divine nautre. This latter passage should be noted more specifically, for the idea should play a great part in our later

study of what it means to have fellowship within the Church and in life eternal.

What then have we learned concerning the meaning of the word koinonia?

- 1. The basic meaning of the word is the sharing in some possession which belongs to the whole group.
- 2. From this it is seen that those who share are fellows or partners.
- 3. This sharing entails a common interest and a common work.
- 4. When applied to things which are intimate and elevated it is a sharing in things sacred, a work within the framework of a divine relationship. It is a communion on the one hand between man and God.

Thus, at its highest, it implies community of interest,
sharing in things most sacred, and fellowship in a society with
the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

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II. The Old Testament illustration of the idea of koinonia.

Having defined the terms which we are to use, we will now find it profitable to look at the fellowship as it actually functioned. Because our later study will be specifically in the New Testament, it will be better to look at the practice of such a fellowship in the Old Testament before we turn to the New

Testament. This will present its characteristics in a clearer light.

1. The terms used to describe this fellowship in the Old Testament.

Among the Hebrew words which are used to describe this fellowship, the most prominent is the word CHAVAR. This verb is very much like the Greek word koinoneo which we have studied. It means to bind, or sometimes to string together, or even to unite as allied nations, as in Genesis 14:3 or in Hosea 4:17 where the term is used to describe Ephraim as joined to his idols. In Psalms 122:3 it refers to a city built closely and tightly together, hence the idea of union or of a close fellowship. This is the Hebrew word which lies back of the Greek term which we have already discussed in II Chron. 20:35 where Jehoshaphat joined himself or made an alliance with Ahaziah.

In the noun form the idea is very much the same. In Hosea 6:9 it is used to describe a company of priests who are like a troop of robbers. In Proverbs 25:24 we have an interesting mistranslation. Here the text of our American Standard Version reads "It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than with a contentious woman in a wide house." This term wide is our Hebrew word which we have been translating as common or belonging to a group of individuals. The Revised Standard Version does a much better job of translation. It

reads "It is better to live in a corner of the housetop that in a house shared with a contentious woman." This difference in translation points up quite clearly the meaning of our word, that is it is something which is shared among a group or which belongs to members of a group of fellows. It may even refer to companions or to partners in business as in Job 41:6.

We may conclude then that our Hebrew word <u>CHAVAR</u> means almost exactly the same thing as the Greek word <u>koinonia</u> which is so often used to translate it. There, however, is a striking feature which may throw some light on our use of the term. Very seldom if ever is this Hebrew word used in the Old Testament to describe a relationship between God and man. It is almost universally, if not always, the relationship between man and man.

There is a word, however, which supplies this lack. It is the Hebrew word BERITH. The word BERITH is popularly translated covenant. This probably is its best usage. It is sometimes used to indicate a contractural relationship between man and man, that is, between equals and equally binding upon both. It is, however, more often used as a description of the relationship between God and man. In this case it describes an agreement between two parties who are not on an equal plane. There are certain features which seem to stand out quite clearly. The first is that God is the one who always

approaches man. He is the one who provides the conditions upon which this new relationship is to be predicated. By doing this, God binds himself to an agreement if man is willing to respond. It is to be noted that in all of these matters, the approach lies with God, and it is God's covenant. Anything which comes to man as a result of this arrangement must never be considered as earned but rather as God's free gift through covenant.

It must be recognized, on the other hand, that no covenant agreement is ever consummated until man himself responds to God's offer. Only man is capable of such response. Once he has accepted it, however, he is subject to its consequences whether for good or for ill. It is this character which is found constantly throughout the Old Testament in the description of the covenant idea with its relationship between man and God.

2. The actual expression of this idea in the Old Testament.

This idea of covenant, or community, or fellowship becomes much more significant when we see it in action in the Old Testament account than when we simply survey the words. We must first examine the covenant as a relationship between God and man. We shall then be in a position to say what kind of obligation this implies among men who mutually have accepted the covenant.

Probably the clearest presentation of the covenant is that

which is recorded of the covenant between God and Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Here God approaches Abraham in the Ur of Chaldees. There is evidence elsewhere that heretofore Abraham may not have been a worshiper of God or at least may have worshiped him among other supposed gods. When God comes to Abraham he makes him an offer of a great posterity, of a land, and of the blessing upon the nations through him, This covenant, however, has its conditions, and it is God who lays down the conditions. Abraham must leave his family; he must leave his land and must go wherever God calls him to go. In other words Abraham, if he is to enjoy the promises of the covenant, must accept its conditions implicitly and must leave the fulfillment of those promises to God. There is a part for him. He may accept or reject the covenant. We may speculate as to what would have happened had Abraham decided to reject this covenant. It is quite obvious from the history of the Old Testament that, had he done so, there would have been no further transaction between himself and God. The matter would have been closed. There could be no covenant.

Abraham, however, did accept the covenant. He fulfilled the conditions which God laid upon him. As he continued to fulfill these conditions, the promises gradually unfolded themselves. Abraham did not realize all that was involved in the fulfillment of his covenant. That was left to his descendants.

Yet either in fact or in promise God stood true to his part of the covenant. Abraham, on his side, stood true to his part. The climaxing statement which describes this covenant relationship is that Abraham was called the friend of God. Here indeed is an example of fellowship between God and man, predicated on the basis of the mutual relationship of covenant. This incident which we have just surveyed will stand for us as an example of many of the principles which will appear again and again in our study of the problem in the New Testament.

It would be possible to make a much more elaborate investigation of the concept of the covenant idea if we examined the covenant at Sinai. The fact is, however, that the covenant at Sinai, while it differs in detail, does not differ greatly in princilpe from the elements of fellowship or covenant involved in the covenant with Abraham. We need only look at a few examples of how this covenant expressed itself at Sinai. In the first place it is a covenant offered by God to Israel. It is based upon the mighty acts which God had done for Israel. Thus over and over again in the history of Israel, there is the reference to the fact that God is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; that by the plagues he had delivered Israel from Egypt, and with a high hand and a mighty arm he had led them out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. On the ground of what God had done, he promises that he will do other things for them. Especially they were promised the privilege of a prosperous and happy land.

They were likewise to be the carriers of God's revelation.

The covenant became effective, however, only when Israel accepted it and agreed to the terms which God had prescribed. This is clearly seen in the presentation of the covenant in the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 as well as in the elaboration of the covenant in the whole Mosaic law. When Israel accepted Jehovah as her God and agreed to live by his law, the covenant was in effect. This same idea is most clearly presented in Josh. 24:14-22 where Joshua calls Israel to a renewal of the covenant which she had made at Sinai. Joshua startles them with the statement that they cannot be God's people because they will not do his will. The response of the people that they are determined to do God's will brings from Joshua the declaration that they are witnesses against themselves that they have taken upon their own shoulders the responsibility of the covenant.

A careful examination of the working out of this covenant demonstrates that the relationship with God was expressed by obedience, worship, and stewardship. The worship of Israel as she fulfilled her covenant is most highly symbolized in the sacrifices, especially the sacrifice of the annual Day of Atonement which was associated with one of the great festivals. The idea of stewardship was most clearly emphasized in the Sabbath

which reminded Israel always that she belonged totally to God, and the tithe which reminded her that everything she had belonged to God.

An emphasis which we must not overlook at this point is that all of those who had accepted this covenant with God now were drawn into a fellowship of mutual community. They were to be a holy or a separated community (Lev. 19:2). Within this separated community they were to live in view of their relationship with God. In this holy community there was no distinction between civil and religious law, because everything was to be done in the light of their common obligation to God. One out of many illustrations of this is Deut. 19:14 where the moving of the ancient land marks was not simply a civil offense such as stealing, but was a religious offense because God had given the land. The religious festivals were a constant reminder that in everything they were God's people and the recipients of God's goodness. This is especially seen in the annual Day of Atonement when associated with the Feast of Tabernacles which reminded them that they once were wanderers and strangers, but now are God's people and are at home in his land. (Lev. 23:26-43).

It is now time to summarize what we have learned about this word fellowship.

1. We may say first that it is basically a sharing in a common

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possession or a common life.

- 2. Those who participate in this common life are known as partners or fellows, or even in some contexts as brethren.
- 3. The relationship involves mutual responsibility upon every individual as well as mutual privilege to him.
- 4. The relationship within this fellowship may be so close that the persons are considered to be joined or united in a common life even as man and wife are joined in one in marriage.
- 5. Where God is involved, the offer of fellowship comes from him. He states the conditions and the opportunities. There can, however, be no fellowship until man responds.
- 6. When man responds to God's offer, he is committed in the wholeness of his life to the communion or fellowship.

In the studies which are to follow we will have before us the task of determining what the word fellowship means when it is applied to the Church in the New Testament and in our day. To this we shall turn our attention in the next chapter.

#### STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. List all the meanings of the word "fellowship" which you have found in this chapter.
- 2. How does the meaning of "fellowship" as it appears in the Scriptures differ from the ordinary menaing in our day?

- 3. According to the meaning of the word "fellowship" arrived at in this chapter, what things are necessary before people can have fellowship with one another? What is distinctive about religious fellowship?
- 4. In what sense can one have fellowship with God today?

  What part will prayer play in this? How would stewardship
  be involved?
- 5. From what has been learned in this chapter, what are some of the things which the Christian should do to express his fellowship with other Christians.



#### THE GOD WHO COMES TO US

In the previous chapter we sought to determine the meaning of the term fellowship. The results there were such as to indicate that if a fellowship exists, it must be a mutual sharing in common possessions or common endeavor. It may be a relationship between man and man, in which, in most cases, it is a relationship of equals who are joined in partnership or brotherhood. On the other hand it may be a relationship between God and man. In this case it is a relationship between unequals in which God is always the party of the first part, He is the one who makes the first approach. It is he also who gives us the promises which are to be the fruit of the fellowship and who lays down the conditions upon which the fellowship is made possible. It is left to man to respond to the invitation which God offers to him. At the conclusion of our last discussion we indicated that there is no such thing as fellowship until this response is made on the part of man. discussion of man's response will be left to a later study. It must, however, be kept in mind that this is not overlooked at any point. The discussion which is our subject for study at the moment, then, is the first half of this condition of fellowship, that is, God's approach to us.

In the Bible we are never presented with a God who is described abstractly and out of relationship to our everyday world. He is a God who is known to us in action. In the Old Testament God was known to the Hebrew people, as we have already seen, as the one who brought

them out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. He had made them a people for himself. In the New Testament, while the emphasis is similar, it takes on a different aspect. God comes to us in Christ. Hence, our examination of the subject of the God who comes to us will not be in the abstract terms if our study is to be Biblical, but it must be an examination of the manner in which God comes to us in the person of Christ. This is clearly evident to us when we read in II Cor. 5:19 that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. This could be said to be the theme of discussion for this study.

#### I. It is Christ the Creator and Sustainer of all things who comes to us.

It has been said, and quite rightly, that the New Testament is essentially Christological. By this it is meant that the New Testament concerns itself specifically with Christ and his relationship to man. This does not mean that it has nothing to do with God. It means only that the New Testament conceives man's relationship with God as mediated through Christ. This apparently is the idea which is involved in Jesus' statement in John 14:9. "He who has seen me has seen the Father." Thus, our concern is with the revelation of God through Christ. We are interested in the way in which God has chosen to make himself known to us in Christ whom he has declared our Savior and Lord. The New Testament has much to say about what is called the pre-existence of Christ. We are reminded at the outset in John 1:1, 2 that he was in the beginning with God and that he was God. Here, of

course, the reference is to the Word, but this is only another name for the Christin his pre-existent relationship with the Father. Thus we are concerned not simply with the coming of the babe in the manger in Bethlehem, but with that one who was with God from the very beginning of all things and of whom it can be said that by his very nature he was God.

This divine being who is the Word of God and is God's Son is so much like him that we are told that he "reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature. " (Heb. 1:3). Such a being as this was no passive object for contemplation and worship but was thoroughly active in the creation of all things. In John 1:3 we are told that all things were made through him and that without him nothing was made which has come into existence. In Col. 1:15, 16 we have an even clearer statement of this particular emphasis. Here, if one wished to examine the play upon Greek prepositions, he would find some very interesting features. The passage, however, even in the English translation, is adequate for our purposes. It is asserted first of all that Christ is the image of the invisible God. We are told further in verse 16 that in him all things were created, and in order to be emphatic, the apostle lists the things created as things "in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities." The apostle further makes the statement that all things were created through him. Here, apparently, he intends to say that the pre-existent Christ is not

God alone, but he, as God's Son and the image of the invisible God, has been the agent through whom God created all things. Furthermore, the apostle states that all things were created for him. Here is a very significant statement, for it implies that the nature of the creation is that it might find the purpose of its existence in him and might glorify him.

Not only was the Son God's agent in creation, but he is likewise the preserver of all creation. In Heb. 1:1-3 we are told that the Son upholds the universe by his word of power. This same idea is reflected in Col. 1:17 where it is asserted that in him all things hold together. Here then is the idea that this pre-existent Christ is responsible not only for the origin of our universe, but that he has a hand in its on-going continuance and that its very orderliness as a universe is due to his sustaining power. Still further it is asserted that the purpose of all creation is that it move toward him and find in him its glory and its reason for existence.

It is this Christ then, the creator and sustainer of all things, and the goal of all things, who comes to us men to live among us and to call us into fellowship with God.

II. The purpose of his coming was that he might be man.

The church has for many centuries celebrated the event of Christ-

mas. Unfortunately it has far too often missed the point of this great celebration. It has seen in the child of Bethlehem the embodiment of the sweetness, gentleness, and love of a tender child and a loving mother. All this, of course, it should be, but the Christian message has something far more strong and virile to say to us about the birth of the babe in the manger of Bethlehem. It is not strange that the Gospel according to John does not describe the birth of Christ in the manger in Bethlehem . Instead, in one single verse, it summarizes the tremendous power of the event without even mentioning its historical setting. In John 1:14 we read the simple but tremendously important statement "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." We must not take this statement lightly. Certainly we must be conscious of the real human existence of Jesus of Nazareth. It is this idea which the epistle of John urges upon us as we read: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands.... " (I John 1:1) Here the writer insists that we take seriously the human life of Jesus. At other places within the epistle, we are likewise warned against the terrible danger of denying the fact that Jesus is the Christ as well as denying the Father and the Son, and in I John 2:23 the terrible anathema is pronounced, "No one who denies the Son has the Father. " The other side of the picture is seen in the blessing which is pronounced, "He who confesses the Son has the Father also." This Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, then, is the Christmas event, and yet it is far more than that. It is everthing which we can

conceive in Christ's coming among men to share our human lot, to become, as the Hebrew writer puts it in 2:14-18, a partaker in our flesh and blood. He is one of us, and the Christmas event cannot be understood unless it is understood in the light of the carpenter shop in Nazareth, and the preaching by the seaside in Galilee, and the sermon to the multitudes on the mountain. It can be understood only in the hunger, and the thirst, and the loneliness of the days of Galilee and in the weary and dusty roads, and filthy streets of Jerusalem. It cannot be understood even then, unless we stand back and look at the Christ of Calvaryand see the agony of his soul and understand something of what he meant in the cry, "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). Furthermore, it cannot be understood unless it is viewed still further in the perspective of the resurrection and the ascension, when the disciples realized fully that he who had walked among them was both their human friend and the Lord of all mankind.

One of the things which is most difficult for us to understand is the idea that he actually shared, and shared fully, in our flesh and blood. The epistle to the Hebrews seems to have caught this idea as no other portion of the New Testament. Though it does so at fewer points, still it does it equally well with the Gospels. Here we read of him who was made for a little time lower than the angels. He shared our flesh and blood that he might deliver us from the fear of death. He becomes our sympathetic and understanding high priest because he himself has shared

our humanity. He is our help in every temptation because he himself was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. It is only as we become aware of the fullness of this humanity of Christ and of the kinship of Jesus of Nazareth with us that the real majesty of this fellowship with God comes to bear in upon us.

Probably the most comprehensive statement of this whole concept is to be found in a passage where the idea is entirely incidental, Apostle Paul writes to the church at Philippi. There has been some difficulty and misunderstanding in the church. In order to encourage love and consideration the Apostle urges in Phil. 2:5; "Have this mind among yourselves which you have in Christ Jesus. " Then, in order to illustrate what this mind was, he states concretely what happened in the incarnation of our Lord. He was in the form of God, which meant equality with God. This, however, he did not consider a thing to be grasped or held on to. With the mind of love and self sacrifice he emptied himself. It would be quite useless for us here to concern ourselves with all that is meant by that term. Theologians have been writing about this for centuries. Paul probably does it much better by adding the statement that he took the form of a servant. Then to be even more specific, he states that he was born in the likeness of men. Here is the incarnation. This, we may say, was the Christmas event, but to say this is not enough. Paul continues in verse 8, to assert that"... being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." This is the ultimate of God's coming to us. It means that Christ so far shared our humanity that he shared it in his birth, in his daily life, in his strength, and in his weakness, in his temptation and in his death. It is utterly impossible for us to conceive the nature of the person of Christ and the nature of our fellowship with him without realizing this oneness of ourselves with him.

A much simpler statement of this whole matter is presented in the Gospels. The passages about which we have been speaking have been pretty largely what have been called theological passages. Of course, the Gospels cannot be called non-theological because they were written for a particular purpose. Yet they are straightforward accounts of the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Here we see him as he walked among men. He was to many, so unimpressive that they despised him. To others he was such a wonder worker that they followed him simply to see the signs which he did. Others saw in him the possibility of some physical or material gain and so sought his services. Others caught a dream of the kingdom of God and followed him until the dream was shattered by too severe demands, and still others, having caught a better view, saw him as Christ Jesus and knew that in this man from Nazareth they had found the God who came to be man that there might be a real fellowship between man and God.

III. In giving himself for us, Christ has offered us fellowship with God.

What we have said about Christ as divine and the man Jesus as hu-

man comes to bear at exactly the point where we think in terms of the fellowship which God offers us through our relationship with Christ. Such an event and offer as this could never be described in ordinary conversational terms. This the New Testament writers feel very really. They are thoroughly at loss to describe the thing of which they are convinced. Thus they approach it from paractically every avenue and use a multiplicity of illustrations and analogies to explain the nature of this offer which God has made to us in Christ. We shall examine a number of these suggestions and then attempt to draw some conclusions.

A striking statement is made by the Apostle Paul in II Cor. 8:9. He is discussing at this point the offering which he urged upon the Gentile Christians in order to relieve the necessities of the Christians in Jerusalem. Then as an incentive and illustration in verse 9, he makes the statement "For you know the grave of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that by his poverty you might become rich." The Apostle is saying here almost exactly the same thing which he said in Phil. 2. But upon careful examination, we can see that he is saying even more. He is saying not only that Christ had such a mind as to share our common humanity, but beyond this he is saying that by the sharing of our common humanity, he has imparted to us something of the richness of his own divine life. Listen again to the words, "though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor." Thus far we are not puzzled, but when we follow out the quotation, we are confronted with

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a striking and illuminating fact: "so that by his poverty you may become rich. "Paul certainly is not stating here a systematic theological doctrine but he is saying that in a way which we probably do not understand, the very presence of Christ within our world and by his sharing our human nature he has made possible the impartation of divine life to us. The sharing of this divine life on our part is entrance into fellowship with God.

Tron the Another description of this offer of fellowship is presented in John 12:32. Here Jesus, in the shadow of the cross, makes the statement that when he is lifted up from the earth he will draw all men to himself. The writer comments that he was speaking about the death which he was about to die. This passage is very closely related to the idea stated by Paul in II Cor. 5:14, 15. Here we find the striking gem, "For the love of Christ controls us." Some of our older versions use the word "constrains, "and it is sometimes interpreted as "compels, "but whatever may be the translation of the particular word, Paul is quite clear on the point. It is not our love for Christ of which he speaks. The context makes this clear. It is Christ's love for us that draws us to him, compels our urges, and controls our life. Thus both John and Paul seem to be saying to us that Christ in his death on the cross so demonstrated to us the love of God that when we contemplate it out of our sin and suffering and failure, if we will only open our eyes, we will be drawn irresistibly to him. This is the secret of the drawing power of Christ.

Another way in which the writers of the New Testament describe this opportunity of fellowship which has been made possible for us is under the figure of sacrifice. In Heb. 9:11-14, and in fact throughout the Hebrew letter, there is a strong emphasis upon the death of Christ as a sacrifice in our behalf. He is our high priest who has made an acceptable offering. He has entered into the Holy Place and made our peace with God. But to make it even more emphatic, the offering which he carries into God's presence is not the blood of bulls and goats, but the offering of his own blood. By his death, he has prepared for us an eternal redemption. This obviously is an attempt to understand the death of Christ in terms of Old Testament sacrifices, and yet it seeks to go beyond the Old Testament sacrificial system to see in it the living personal relationship of him who was made for a little time lower than the angels, who yet was willing to give his life on the cross for us. His blood has made atonement for our sins. He who is unwilling to recognize the Christ and to live up to the level of his Christian faith has become worse than the sinner. In fact, he has counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified an unholy thing (Heb. 6:6; 10:29). There is a point beyond which he may go from which there is no return. Such a despising of the death of Christ and a refusal to recognize his sacrifice is an unpardonable blasphemy. On the other hand he who recognizes the value of the death of Christ, and himself comes before the Holy altar, the cross, finds freshly opened for him a new and living way. His body is washed with pure water. His heart is cleansed by the blood of Christ. He enters with boldness into the presence of God himself (Heb.

10:19-22). All of this is the effect of the death of Christ on the cross.

Still another way in which the death of Christ is viewed is under the term, ranson. This is used especially in Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 where it is asserted that the Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost and to give himself a ransom for many. This idea is not elaborated, but it sticks very firmly in the language and thought of the New Testament. Man is lost. He cannot save himself. Christ his brother comes and ransoms or redeems him from the bondage into which he has sold himself, and by that ransom, or redemption man now becomes free. It is interesting, as we shall see later, that this idea of ransoming or redemption through the blood of Christ is very significantly portrayed in the cup in the Lord's Supper, for he who is our brother and yet our Savior gave himself for our redemption.

The figure which has struct and occupied the attention of theologians more than any other is that found in Romans 3:24-26. Here Paul states that we are justified by faith in Christ. It is by our faith in him that we are set free at the bar of justice and become free men to serve him. This is the language of the law court. Man is described as a violator of the law. He is guilty and should come under the judgment of him who administers the justice of the law. Yet Christ steps in as one who is our defender. In some way, not explained by the apostle, our faith in him makes it possible for him to take upon himself the burden and the guilt of our sin, to bear it away and ket us go

free. It is this figure which lies behind the historic statement that we are justified by faith.

All of these figures related to the life and death of Christ point up to one thing. It is in Christ that God has come to us to offer to us this fellowship with himself. He came at great cost. In the life, the suffering, and death of his Son and in this only was the salvation of man made possible. Here then we are confronted with the presence of God among us in the person of Christ and by the personal offer of God who comes to us, this fellowship with him becomes a possibility.

IV. The contemporary significance of these New Testament statements.

Since we have surveyed this data, we are confronted with the difficult fact that we must interpret the meaning of many of these things in such a way that they can be applied to our contemporary situation. We said at the outset that it would be necessary for us to recapture the great ideas of the church and then to make them mean to us what they meant to the people of the first century. Now we are ready to make a statement beyond this. We must not only recapture the ideas, but we must take these ideas and give them meaning in our contemporary life and society. In the light of this demand, what shall we say about the offer which God has made to us in his Son both in his life and in his death and resurrection?

In answering this question the Church has constantly found itself involved in theological difficulty. The first problem which it has faced has been the problem, "How can God come down to man?" There have been

various ways of answering this. One of the earliest heretical answers was a denial of the real humanity of Jesus. It was asserted that he was not a human being at all but he only appeared to be so. This idea was based upon the contention that God was spirit and therefore all good. Matter on the other hand was all evil, and the two could never meet. Hence Christ could only appear to live among men. He could never actually take upon himself our humanity. This answer, of course, did not satisfy.

Another answer to the question is a certain modern view which denies that God comes to meet man, but denies it in another way. The man Jesus, it is said, is only man. There may be some "spark" of deity within him, but he still is man like any other man. He has only achieved a bit more of the will of God than the rest of us. By virtue of his towering character as man he becomes our teacher, our example, and our guide. This has not satisfied the Church.

Still another attitude, which is not really an answer, is far more prevalent within the Church than either of these two. It is a complacent and unenthusiastic assumption that God does come to man but that this is no concern. It is very probable that this is the attitude which is taken by the greater number of folk who are indifferent to their religion. God may have spoken in Christ. Christ died for our sins, but it is like the event recorded in yesterday's newspaper which has no particular concern for us. The report of it has come to us and we have become accustomed to it. In such a case, the believer has lost the thrill and the dynamic of the wonder

of the Church that such a thing could happen. It is a kind of deadened existence where all things have turned into a pale gray and man has lost his concern. He accepts the gift as a fact and never wonders that such a glorious thing should have happened to him.

The Church at its best has never been satisfied with any of these three approaches. It has lost itself in amazement and awe at the fact of the incarnation. Its theologies have sought to interpret it in one way or another. Christians have been certain that God has bridged the gap by speaking to man in the Old Testament through the patriarchs and prophets. This is remote and yet it is indeed a tremendous and marvelous bridging of the gap. God has revealed himself to man and made the offer of a covenant relationship. In the New Testament God has done even better. He does not simply speak; he comes and lives among men. In the person of Christ he is among us to share our needs and our weeknesses, to enjoy our triumphs and to impart to us a divine life which the Hebrew writer describes as this eternal redemption which brings man back to God (Heb. 912).

The Church in its awe and wonder may evolve her theories of the incarnation. She may seek to find what best explanations or illustrations can be used to describe how God can come to man, but in spite of all of her explanations, in the last analysis, she can only bow in submissive awe and wonder, and realize as did the shepherds outside Bethlehm or the apostles in the boat in the storm, or possibly the centurion at the foot of the cross, that this man is indeed Son of God even though

we do not know how.

The second problem which has confronted the Church more constantly than the problem of the incarnation is the problem of the atonement. The question here is "How can the death of Christ save us?" The facts are very rarely in dispute. They can be stated quite precisely. Man by his sin has been alienated from God. He is desperately is need of salvation. He recognizes that his own strength and ingenuity are totally incapable of procuring his salvation. Just as surely as this is true, it is true also that God has in Christ made possible man's salvation. It is God's free gift to him. It is offered graciously by a loving God to man who knows that he does not deserve the gracious offer. Furthermore it is recognized that this possibility of salvation and of God's supreme offer of fellowship have been affected supremely in the death and resurrection of Christ. Whatever part may have been played by the life of Christ and by his teaching, or even by his example, it is clearly recognized that the Gospel writers place the emphasis upon the death of Christ. Again we are confronted with the question"How can we in our day understand the significance of such an act?"

The theologians have, through the centuries, been busy trying to explain to man how God could make possible such salvation. They have taken, for example, the word "ransom" which is a perfectly good New Testament term, and out of the word have developed all sorts of theories as to the way in which the death of Christ, or the blood of Christ, or the life of Christ, or Christ himself is offered as a ransom. Sometimes the

ransom has been to God, sometimes to Satan. Sometimes the procedure has been such as to be quite understandable, and at other times has been fogged thoroughly by some kind of mystical interpretation. The word ransom remains as an illustration, but the ransom theories, as much truth as they contain, can never be a full and adequate answer to our problem.

Some have concentrated their attention upon Christ's identification of himself with us. He took upon himself our humanity. By his identification with us it has been possible for him to impart the divine life which dwells so richly in him and, because he became man, we also may become like God. Here again there is a great deal of truth, and yet this alone does not answer the question. It stands as an excellent illustration of a fact too deep for us to comprehend, but it is not an exhaustive explanation of God's plan of redemption.

Other theologians have seen only those passages which tell of the love of God manifest in Christ. They have felt that the love of God which was expressed in the death of Christ so draws us out of ourselves and away from our sin that we, in faith, may fall at the foot of the cross and there find for-giveness for our sins and restoration to the fellowship for which we long. Certainly, there is an element of truthinvolved here, but this answer seems not to recognize sufficiently the depth of the root of sin within us. A careful survey of the New Testament would not justify this as a sufficient answer to the question as to how the death of Christ saves us.

Other theologians have emphasized the idea of sacrifice. They have talked to us of the Old Testament sacrifices and of the typology which has been brought to fulfillment in the death of Christ. Much has been said about the blood of Christ and its cleansing effect. The altar upon which Christ offered himself as high priest has been the subject of our concern. Certainly there is truthin this answer, and no one can adequately visualize the tremendous depth of the atonement without realizing the validity of this explanation. Still, the New Testament writers feel it necessary to use so many others that one cannot be satisfied to use this one alone.

Still others have taken the idea of justification or the satisfaction of divine law as the key to the whole problem of the atonement. It is true that Paul uses the term justification so frequently that the analogy is clear. It certainly is true that there are many parallels between our relationship with God and the idea of law and justice, of punishment and forgiveness, and yet Paul himself reminds us in many places that the atonement is not only that situation in which the prisoner stands acquitted at the bar, but it is the point also at which the child is born into the new family. Thus while the term justification may tell us much about the atonement, it still leaves something unsaid.

What shall we say in the face of all these facts? Paul seems to give us a clue to the answer in Romans 3:24-26. He mixes his figures so thoroughly that one who is a stickler for proper rhetorical procedure would find himself disturbed at Paul's improper use, but Paul does not consider it

improper. In this passage he uses, within the same setting, the idea of justification, the idea of redemption, or ransom, the idea of expiation by Christ's blood which is indeed sacrifice, and the idea of divine forebearance which is another name for God's love for us. In this mixture of figures, Paul is saying to us that the way in which Christ saves us and brings us into fellowship with himself is something which is so rich, so complex, and so full that it cannot be limited by any one of our small human situations. Only as we reach out to the full grasp of all of the possibilities embodied in these ideas, can we begin to see its grandeur.

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Our answer then must be this. In God's goodness he has come to us out of his deep love, giving us this gracious offer of salvation. The significance of the act is so varied and deep that only in eternity can we comprehend its full meaning. Here he comes to us in Christ, meets us with an offer of full fellowship with himself, and leaves us with a decision. Even our riches figures of speech are impoverished when we come face to face with him. We can only bow before him and cry out with the Apostle, "Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!" (II Cor. 9:15).

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Reexamine the different ways in which the New Testament writers describe the way in which the death of Christ saves us. What meaning do these have for you in our contemporary situation? What do they say

about God's love? What do they say about the nature of sin?

- 2. If one thinks of the Christmas story in the light of John 1:14, what additional meaning will it have? Is there anyway to make this meaning understood to people in our day?
- 3. In view of what we have learned about God's concern for us, how important do you feel that religion should be?
- 4. In the light of this study, how can one come better to appreciate the worship services of the Church?
- 5. In view of the conclusions reached in this chapter, do you think a person can be intelligently religious, and proud and selfish at the same time? Explain your answer.

## LIVING SACRIFICE

We discussed first the nature of the fellowship which the Bible portrays as possible between God and man, and secondly the manner in which God comes to man in Christ with his gracious offer of fellowship. We have seen, at the same time, that fellowship is of such a nature that it does not come without the response of man. The question to which we now address ourselves is this: "How does man respond to this offer of God?"

## I. Man finds himself an alien even from a loving God.

Throughout the Scriptures man is constantly reminded that by his sin he has alienated himself from God; by his goodness he cannot earn God's favor.

In the Old Testament the form which the approach to God took was a repeated sacrifice which was offered up. On the annual Day of Atonement the nation was reminded that it had sinned and that even its priests must cleanse themselves before they were in a position to come into the presence of the Holy God. The offereing of the sacrifices were such as constantly to remind Israel that a death had to take place before it was possible for them to renew their right relationships with God. The prophets found it necessary to remind Israel that this offering of sacrifices was inadequate unless it was associated with a personal response of humility and repentance before the living God. This theme

is so consistant through the Old Testament that further illustration is needless.

Paul makes this equally clear in Romans 1:18-3:20. He first indicates that the Gentile who had had the opportunity for a knowledge of God had turned his back on that knowledge, and had willfully sought to do his own will. In this case God had abandoned him to his own desires and the Gentile had fallen prey to a licentious and evil worship of creatures of his own making and of things lower than himself. In the second chapter of Romans Paul turns to the account of the Jew and calls him to face frankly his insincerity and his hypocrisy. While he had the living oricles of God, he yet did that which was displeasing to God and found that he stood condemned equally along with the Gentile. Probably no listing of sins or catagories of evil deeds is any more scathing than that which the Apostle charges against the whole race in Romans 3:9-18. His conclusion is that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. No man, by his own efforts, attains to a fellowship with God. He may as well seek to lift himself out of the mud by his own boot straps as to earn his way into the favor of God.

The matter is approached with the same background of thought and yet from a strikingly different point of view in Jesus' discussion in John 6:53-58. Here Jesus asserts that those who have not believed in the Son are dead. The mere fact of biological existence can in no way be considered as life. A man may be rich or prosperous or successful

and yet unless he has found this relationship with God he is dead. It is only as men believe in him and come to him that they receive life eternal. Thus Jesus places the denunciation upon all mankind that they are so thoroughly dead that they must be brought to life by the power of him who brings life to all mankind. Without that gift of life they are utterly lost.

In writing to the Ephesians (Eph. 2:1-6) the Apostle Paul reminds the Gentiles of essentially the same fact. They once were dead in their trespasses and sins. A similar condemnation is implied for the Jews. While they may have had the covenants and the promises of God, yet it was necessary that through the death of Christ they might be brought into union with him. The classic statement of Paul applied to the Gentiles may be in a sense applied to all mankind. "Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." (Eph. 2:12). By the works of their hands or the deeds of their lives there was no possibility of approach to God (Eph. 2:8, 9). The solution must be found somewhere other than in man's own goodness.

II. Through the preaching of the Gospel man is invited into fellowship with God.

There is one fact which is distinctive of the early church above everything else. That is the preaching of the Gospel. The Church was

called into being by the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. The function of the Church, once it was constituted, was that of preaching the Gospel to others that they might be brought into this same fellowship. The question then is, "What do we mean by the preaching of the Gospel?"

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In our contemporary religious thought we are indebted to C. H. Dodd in his little book The Apostolic Preaching and its Development for calling our attention to the fact that there was in the New Testament a vast difference between preaching and teaching. Much of what we call preaching would have been in the New Testament designated as teaching. That is, it is ethical instruction or instruction in what one must do in order to live as a Christian. The term preaching was never used for this in the New Testament. The term preaching on the other hand was applied to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ to those who were unsaved. Exactly what was its form and limitations has been a question of discussion among theologians, but the central facts are clear. At the outset it is clear that the Gospel recounts the mighty acts of God which have reached their fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Christ. The sermon of Peter on the Day of Pentecost is especially illustrative of this (See Acts 2). God had been active in history among his people in Old Testament times and had anticipated the coming of his Messiah. This he had foretold through the prophets. He had likewise made himself known in Jesus of Nazareth through the mighty works and wonders and signs which he did publicly among the people. Furthermore it was within the scope of the program of God that Israel had delivered up Jesus and that he had been crucified and slain by the hands of men without the law. But death could not retain such a one as he. God had raised him up by his mighty power and now he sat at the right hand of God, and of this the apostles were witness. The Holy Spirit, which now had come upon the apostles and which was to abide within the church, was to be witness to him.

These were the mighty deeds of God which he had done and by which he had manifested his mighty power. One cannot help noting the parallel between this statement of tremendous events in the plan of God as narrated by Peter at the inauguration of the new covenant and that chain of events culminating in the exodus narrated by Moses at the institution of the old covenant. The deeds were different and the covenants were different but it was God in each case who was now offering to man a fellowship with him in a covenant.

This Gospel which was preached, centered itself especially in the death and resurrection of Christ. This we can see quite clearly in Paul's statement to the Corinthians (I Cor. 15:1-3). He had proclaimed to them of first importance that Christ had died for their sins according to the Scriptures. He had been buried and had been raised from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures. This was the unyielding foundation of the Church's faith. If they held fast to this their salvation was secure. If this were empty and vain the whole structure of the

church and of their salvation was empty. For Paul and for the early church there was no question. The death of Christ had made possible this new fellowship with God.

In preaching, the Gospel was presented as an offer to man. It was God's offer of salvation that man should come to him and receive the gift of eternal life. The great deeds of God in Jesus of Nazareth made it clear that Jesus was Christ and Savior and Lord. Those who recognized their sinfulness and desired this offered salvation need only submit themselves to him in faith and obedience and the longdesired fellowship was theirs. To us in our complex world this may seem over-simplified. To those, however, in the early Church when the events were fresh and the evidence of the resurrection of the crucified Christ so new, it was not at all strange. In Acts 2:32-38 the Lordship of Jesus is stated specifically and the response is instantaneous. The constitution of the Church as a fellowship of those who believed in Jesus as the Christ and who responded to God sinvitation was a warm, living reality. Thus it becomes clear that this fellowship about which we have been speaking so far now becomes a reality for mankind. At the point when men hear and accept the Gospel, and in sincere faith and obedience submit themselves to the will of Christ, is the living fellowship of believers.

III. It is man who must now make the response to God's offer.

We are now put in a position in which we must come to a more

thoroughly factual examination of the means by which man enters this fellowship with God. The question is "Just how is it to be done?"

1. The over-all answer to this question is that man comes to God by surrender of life through faith. Paul states it quite clearly in Romans 12:1, 2 when he begins the practical exhortation of his letter. "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Here Paul declares that this response to God on the part of man must be a surrender of man's total self. It is a surrender of his body in daily living which can be accomplished only when his mind has been so transformed that his attitudes, his desires, and his affections have been conformed to the will of God.

Much confusion has arisen in our understanding of this problem as the result of the use of the two English words faith and belief as a translation of the one Greek New Testament word pistis. This one word is translated sometimes as faith and sometimes as belief. The verb which is related to it is, however, used consistently as "to believe". There is sometimes the slight variation "to have faith" but this is quite infrequent. The idea has arisen both in theology and in popular thought that faith and belief are two separate and distinct

things. The fact that this idea is represented by a single Greek word, will caution us that there must be a very intimate and inseparable connection between what we call faith and what we call belief.

Further confusion has come through the effort to place an exclusive emphesis upon one or another phase of the meaning of the word.

We are sometimes told that it must apply only to an acceptance of historic fact. At another time we are told that it is a response to the will of God which is motivated within us by God's spirit and the suggestions range all the way between. In the New Testament this word, faith, has several shades of meaning. These are not exclusive but rather are progressive from one to the other.

On its simplest level faith or belief is the acceptance of something as true. This acceptance may be based upon one's own individual experience, or upon evidence which is presented to him or upon the testimony or other individuals whom he deems reliable. The greater part of our knowledge, if not all of it, is derived from this kind of testimony or evidence. One need not argue the case that we believe practically everything which we accept to be true—basically on these grounds. It is likewise true that in the New Testament belief in the works of Jesus, in his death, and in his resurrection was accepted on these very bases. Indeed many of the things which constituted one's belief regarding the church, came through these channels and was simply belief of fact as based upon testimony or experience.

When this belief or faith has been applied to Jesus, however, it usually takes on an additional characteristic. It is not simply belief that he did or said this or that. The very nature of Jesus was such that the evidence demonstrates that he was a striking person in whom one could have implicit trust or confidence. It is to be noticed in the New Testament that very seldom does anyone speak of believing Jesus. Usually it is believing in Jesus. This belief in Jesus, in its literal Greek form, implies the putting of one's belief into him as a person. We may put it into our common English terminology as trust or confidence in the individual. We not only believe what he says or what he is reported to have done, but we have such confidence in him as a person that we are willing to believe what he says to be true and to believe his actions to be good. This phase of believing in Jesus is very strikingly illustrated in the case of the disciples in John 2:11 as contrasted with the multitudes in John 2:23, 24. It is also illustrated in the case of the father of the epileptic boy in Mark 9:24.

Faith or belief reaches its ultimate in Jesus when a person has passed through the first and second of these phases and realizes that the one in whom he now has confidence is such as to call him to surrender his whole life in loyalty and service to him. It is this use of the word belief or faith that runs so frequently through the fourth Gospel. It appears, of course, elsewhere particularly in the epistles of Paul. It is reflected most vividly in the confession of Thomas in John 20:28. Thomas

had refused to accept the testimony of the ten that Jesus had been raised from the dead. When, however, the risen Christ appeared before him, there was not only the evidence of the nail prints in his hands and the javelin wound in his side but his own personal experience of Jesus as Lord that convinced him. The result of this combination of factors was such that Thomas cried out with the most exalted confession of faith to be found anywhere in the Gospels, "My Lord and my God."

How then does man come to God? In the first place he must come in faith and this is faith or belief which arises out of the preaching of the Gospel and which is consummated in the commitment of life on the part of the individual.

2. Very closely associated with faith in the New Testament and, in fact arising out of it as a condition of fellowship, is repentance. As early as the preaching of John, repentance from sin was required as a condition of participation in the coming kingdom. Jesus preached essentially the same message regarding the kingdom. The word "repentance" finds a very prominent place in the preaching of the New Testament and calls for our attention here. The Greek word metanoia signified a transformation of mind, or attitude, or thinking. The New Testament implies further, that this transformation of one's faculties is to express itself in a new way of life. It is quite possible that we have placed too much Latin in our interpretation of the word repentance and have applied it far too externally. The result of this external

interpretation, that is, that it is a change in the course of one's life, has led us in modern times to an embarrassing situation. We are not greatly inclined toward a change in the pattern of our lives even when confronted by Christ. Since this change in pattern of life has had no deep roots in our convictions, we have tended to let repentance go by, and while we have paid lip service to it, it has found its place incidentally between faith and baptism and has been lost in that obscure spot. This is not true of the New Testament concept.

The origin of repentance is of great significance. Repentance or the change of attitude which finds its expression in change of conduct, arises when one is confronted by Jesus. An Old Testament example of a similar experience is found in Isaiah's vision in the temple as recorded in Isaiah 6. Isaiah repents, and his great confession of sin arises spontaneously to his lips when he is confronted by the glory of the Lord in which throws into such clear and starkly revealing light his own sinfulness. This causes him to cry out that he is a man of unclean lips and dwells in the midst of a people of unclean lips.

The New Testament furnishes us with equally significant illustrations. On the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2 Peter said very little about the need for repentance. In fact it is not he who mentions the idea of sin. He has presented vividly the Messiah sent from God but rejected by his people. So vividly does he portray this that his hearers see themselves with the blood of the Messiah upon their own hands, and it is they

who, out of their faith cry out, asking what they must do. The simple command of repentance and baptism from the lips of Peter puts the matter in its proper perspective. These people who see themselves now as the sinners who have crucified their Christ and who are so much in need of salvation, are called upon to repent. There must be a change of attitude and outlook. This inward change must then be accompanied by an outward expression in action. There is no secret discipleship. Neither is there to be secret repentance. Repentance will call the sinner out into the open and, just as surely as he desires to transform his own darkened heart because the light of Christ has shined upon it, he will desire likewise to transform his life because the light of Christ shines so vividly upon it. Through repentance which has been produced because one believed in Jesus as the Christ, man seeks to find his way to God.

3. The initial outward expression of faith and repentance in the New Testament is embodied in the public act of baptism. In this connection, the evangelical churches have placed considerable emphasis upon confession. This emphasis in and of itself has not been wrong. We are reminded in the Scriptures that Simon Peter declared his faith in Jesus at Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16:16). In Acts 8:37, which is found in some of our ancient manuscripts and authors, the Ethiopian is recorded as having confessed his faith in Christ. So also Timothy apparently is reminded of this initial confession (I Tim. 6:12). Beyond this, confession in the New Testament seems to be more strongly

emphasized as something which is done by those who are already Christian. Probably the most striking example of this is I Cor. 12:3 where it is stated that no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. This leads to the conclusion that we possibly should rethink the nature of conversion. This is not to suggest that the personal confession of faith on the part of an individual should be disregarded. It does mean, however, that if we take a hint from the New Testament we can see that the association between faith and repentance on the one hand and baptism on the other was so close that confession as a distinct act, separated by a considerable time from these others, did not play any part at all. Again and again we are told that those who believed in Jesus and repented of their sins were baptized the same hour of the night. Confession then is a verbal statement not of the sins we have committed but rather of the faith which we have achieved in Christ. In its New Testament perspective it is inseparably associated with the act of baptism in which the individual, in an objective outward act, demonstrates in symbolic deed the total surrender and commitment of himself to Christ.

What then is baptism? So far as we can possible do so, we should put ourselves into a first century situation and try to understand the significance of baptism aside from the theological imports which have attached themselves to it in later times. A number of considerations then become quite clear.

In the New Testament, baptism was the voluntary act of a believing, penitent individual. This means that a person who had heard the preaching of the Gospel, had believed that message sufficiently to acknowledge Jesus as his Savior and take him as his Lord was ready for baptism. Hence in the act of baptism he portrays before the public, in an unmistakably clear act, that he renounces his old way of life and that he assumes a new way of life which he pledges himself henceforth to pursue.

As a matter so significant, baptism is an act of total obedience, in which the penitent believer publicly places himself under the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus himself sets the pattern for this in the incident recorded in Mt. 3:15. When John protested that it was he who needed to be baptized by Jesus, the response of Jesus was that it was fitting that they should fulfill all righteousness. The term "righteousness" as used here and in the New Testament in certain other contexts, indicates the righteous or proper demands of God. If it had been a matter of Jesus' being baptized in relationship to the forgiveness of his sins with a view to the coming kingdom, such an act would have been wholly unthinkable. He comes to John as the sinless Son of God. Yet he submits himself to a rite which for others was related to repentance and to the forgiveness of sins. For Jesus it could have had no such significance. Commentators have had a field-day with the passage but whatever may have been said one way and another the fact seems to remain that Jesus submitted to baptism at the hands of John simply because of the fact

that this was the will of God. He, along with his people, must subject themselves to the will of God in order that, in the coming kingdom, the will of God might be done in all things upon earth as it is done in heaven. Similarly in Acts 2:38 we are given no explanation as to the theological significance of the act of baptism. It remains a command of God. It may seem a bit strange to us at first, but the implication seems to be that in the surrender of one's self in baptism in which one is submerged beneath the baptismal waters completely in the hands of him who administers it and does so in the obedience to the demand of Christ, he is performing an act of obedience clear and pure and simple. Here is the willing and unquestioning surrender of the penitent believer to the will of Christ (cf. Jesus' baptism in Matt. 3:15). In this act he, in symbol, declares his willingness to be obedient in all things to him who now is Savior and who wishes to be his Lord as well.

Baptism, however, is not purely an act of obedience without significance in and of itself. It is highly symbolic in its form and in its associations. Whatever may be the relationship to John's baptism or Christian baptism in John 3:3,5, baptism is very closely associated with the idea of the new birth. In Titus 3:5 we read of the washing of regeneration which, if we wish to put it in plain everyday English, we may speak of as the washing of the new birth. In both cases this new birth is associated both with the washing of water and with the renewing or vivifying act of the Holy Spirit. Baptism thus is associated with the

new birth, so much so that he who has properly prepared himself for baptism and has in the spirit willed by Christ submitted himself to baptism, has gone through the process of the new birth and is now a child of God.

Baptism is again described as a death, burial, and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6:1-4). Here the implication is clear. The penitent believer is buried in the water of baptism as Christ was buried in the tomb. As Christ was raised up from the dead never again to die but to live in a glorious resurrection, so the believer is raised up to live in union with Christ in this new and risen life. The life which follows, as Paul presents it in Romans 6:5ff, should bear witness to the fact that a believer no longer is himself as he once was, but is now a new being, recreated as if raised from the dead and living for Christ in all the fullness of the purpose of God. It seems to be this to which Paul refers in Gal. 2:20 where he speaks of himself as having been crucified with Christ and therefore himself no longer living. It is Christ who lives in him.

An equally significant statement is found in Gal. 3:27. Paul is writing here about the new relationship which the Christian has in his association with fellow Jew and Gentile since the barriers have been achieved through a procedure utterly inconceivable outside of Christ. To explain this situation Paul makes the striking statement that we are

baptized into Christ. We are, of course, not to suppose that Paul is excluding any of the other emphases which he had made, but it must be made quite clear that the act of baptism, when properly entered into, is here conceived as that initiatory rite by which the individual enters into union with Christ and therefore into union with all others who are in Christ. The result of this union is that all barriers have been broken down. There is now no distinction of Jew or Greek, no distinction of slave or freeman, not even the distinction of male or female but there is a oneness in Christ which the world is utterly incapable of understanding.

What now may we conclude as to the significance of baptism? Our attention is drawn to the passage in I Peter 3:21 in which the statement is made that baptism now saves us. Certainly the writer is aware of the significance of his statement. As in the days of Noah the right-eous remnant of God was saved from the sinful world through the deluge of waters upon the earth and by their presence in the ark, so now through baptism do Christians fine their salvation from a corrupt and degrading world which would destroy their very souls, If, however, one interprets this passage to refer to baptism without some understanding of its prerequisites and its general significance as portrayed in the New Testament Scriptures, he will misunderstand completely the statement of Peter. Baptism is to be understood in the light of its total aspect. It is the voluntary act of a penitent believer. In obedience to

Christ he submits himself publicly to the act of baptism and declares his allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus as Christ. Through all of the processes of his faith, his penitence, and his obedience, he has undergone a new birth and by the power of the Holy Spirit has now been brought into the fellowship of the Church. It is as if he once were dead and now has been brought forth from the tomb to live for ever more. He has been initiated into Christ and now lives in fellowship with him for ever more. It is only as all of these aspects of baptism are drawn together in an understanding of the act, that its significance becomes clear to us.

What may we now say in summary of the nature of man's response? From our study it has become apparent, in the first place, that man's response is basically a loving, willing response. It isn't something which is forced from without. No bolt of lightning forces him into a cringing submission to the will of God, Not even the fires and thunders of Sinai drive him to his knees. Only the kind loving persuasion of God in Christ has played upon him, but he who hears the preaching of the Gospel and is persuaded of its truth finds the tremendous longing for the fellowship with God without which there can be no life eternal. This response in its inward aspect we may describe as faith in which, by the transformation of our inner being, we turn from our own self-centered lives and cast ourselves in utter confidence upon Jesus. In him we have found that one for whom we have longed. He is

our friend who has shared our common humanity. He is the Christ whom God has sent into the world. He is the Savior who died for us. He is the Lord who would take possession of our lives. And now in the utter confidence and submission of faith we stand before him and before his cross with bowed heads and open arms asking only that he receive us as we are and make us into what he would have us be.

Once we have thus come to such a longing desire for submission to Christ and a recognition of his greatness, all of the hideous darkness and malignancy of our soul becomes apparent to our spiritual eyes. Every sin, all bitterness and envy, every blackness of our soul and of our mind, stands out clear as day and in our shame we beg for forgiveness and stand before him penitent, desiring the new life which he comes to bring, With his help we resolve that henceforth we shall walk with him. In this change of mind and attitude and desire, as well as in the change of our outward life, we have found repentance indeed.

But Christianity is not a private matter. There is no such thing as secret discipleship. He who would be a follower of Christ must be one publicly and boldly. It is in the act of baptism intimately associated with our faith and penitence that we express our submission and surrender ourselves to him as our Lord. Thus we cast ourselves upon the Lord and know that he will receive.

The early Chruch had no problem here. The response of the

believer was simple, straightforward, and deep. Our problem has arisen, quite probably, from the fact that we have desired to raise the question, "Which is the more important?" "Is faith or is baptism the more important?" Strangely we have done very little arguing about repentance. In fact we have said so little about repentance that it seems we have wished to forget it all together. The early Church desired to forget none of these things. Nor did it seek to divide this experience up and to raise the question, "Which is the greater and which is the lesser?" The whole of faith, or repentance, and of baptism, this whole entrance into a new relationship with Christ became, for the person of the first century, a single unbroken experience. Each part played its tremendously significant role. Once it had been accomplished he now was a Christian. He was joined in an inseparable union with Christ. He found himself in union with every other Christian. He looked forward to a life of fellowship which knew no end, for it stretched on out into eternity, and man with Christ had forever.

## STUDY OUESTIONS .

- 1. In view of the conclusion reached in Part I, of this chapter, what is the basis of the statement that one is not saved by "works"? Should this conclusion discourage the Christian from doing all the good he can? What should be his attitude toward the evil situations in our modern world?
- 2. From the study of section II, what do you conclude the Gospel to be?

  Why is it necessary for the average sermon today to include instruction in Christian living as well as the message of the "gospel" in the strict

New Testament sense? In view of this study, what do you think the task of evangelism and missions to be?

3. Examine as many as possible of the passages of scripture referred to in Section III of this chapter. From these, what do you conclude to be the nature of (1) faith; (2) of repentance; (3) of baptism? If we were to put these conclusions into actual practice in our day, what are some of the things which you think the Church would accomplish?



Imp from Here

## THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FAITH

We have now discussed the approach which God makes to man and the offer of salvation which he brings, on the one hand, and, on the other, the way in which he has made it possible for man to respond to his offer. When man makes his response to this offer of God and enters into a union with him, there is formed what we may call the fellowship This fellowship of faith by its very nature involves not only a relationship between God and man but a relationship as well between man and man where both have responded to God's offer. Thus we have a community or a fellowship of believers. The question which confronts us at this point is basically this: "What is the nature of this fellowship or community?" We shall assume at the outset, what will become clear in the process of our discussion, that this fellowship or community of faith is the Church. The subject in point in our discussion then is the nature of the Church. In keeping with the procedure which we have previously followed, we shall examine the Church in its Biblical origin and intent and then, if possible, try to understand what the nature of the Church should be in our contemporary society if it is to fulfill its obligations.

I. An historical study of the origin of the Church.

The question of the origin of the Church has plagued theologians for many centuries. Some have proposed that the Church is one

continuous unbroken fellowship. For some this implies that it was in essence in existence since or even before the creation. Still others have suggested that the Church had its origin in the covenant with Abraham. Still others have maintained that it was founded in the covenant with Israel at Mt. Sinai. In any case it was continuous and no real break in the continuity was to be found. It is upon the basis of this idea of the unbroken continuity of the Church that many of the doctrines and practices derived from the Old Testament have found their way into the life and practice of the Church. This position, however, we may find untenable in the light of the fact that in the New Testament, the Church has a peculiar relationship to Jesus as the Christ. Furthermore it is related to certain specific incidents in the life and work of Christ and therefore could not have, in its present form, come into existence until those incidents had taken place. We shall say more of this at a later point.

Another suggestion which has been made is that Jesus never intended the Church at all. This was one of the contentions of liberal protestantism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This position was so generally accepted, in fact, that one need not document the idea. The concept arises out of several different factors. In the first place, the advocates of the social Gospel were not particularly interested in the Church. The kingdom of God was an ideal social order which was to be set up upon the earth. That social order might incorporate the

Church or it might be set up even in antagonism to it. The feature in which we are interested, of course, is the idea that it was a social system derived from the social teachings of Jesus and the prophets which might be wholly independent of the organized Church and therefore, while it might be served by the Church, it did not necessarily need the organized Church to bring it into existence. In fact some of the later advocates of the Social Gospel took the view that the Church was a middle class organization which actually stood in the way of the setting up of the kingdom of God. Thus if the kingdom of God is such a social order as this, to be produced by man from the teachings of the prophets and Jesus, then whether or not Jesus himself intended the Church is not a matter of concern and, in fact, the origin of the Church is not a real problem.

A second approach to this idea that Jesus never intended the Church is derived from the view of Albert Schweitzer set forth in his book The Quest of the Historic Jesus. Schweitzer takes the position that Jesus was a Jew with all of the heritage of his Jewish background. He believed that through him God was to bring in the kingdom. He expected this in his own lifetime. When, however, the people turned from following him and God didnot usher in the kingdom, Jesus became disillusioned and his death was an anticlimax which may even be described the martyrdom of a misguided enthusiast. Thus for Schweitzer there is no place for the Church in Jesus' thought. The kingdom of God

was an apocalyptic order which God was to set up by a miraculous intervention. Schweitzer felt that Jesus taught that he would do so immediately. The Church was thus the construction of Jesus' followers who sought to retrieve what they could of his teachings. This view of Schweitzer swept the theological world from 1900 for several decades and became one of the most dominant points of view.

A third reason why some have suggested that Jesus never intended to form a Church is that the Gospels so very seldom mention the Church but constantly they mention the kingdom of God. It would be needless to cite any series of passages in which the term kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is used in the Gospels. They are thoroughly permeated with the idea. Yet in only two places does the term Church appear in them. In Mt. 16:18 Jesus prophesies that upon the rock which he had in mind he will build his Church and the gates of Hades, or the power of death, will not prevail against it. The other passage is in Mt. 18:17 where Jesus speaks of bringing the incorrigible member of the community before the Church that he may be disciplined and thus brought to penitence. Here, of course, we are confronted with problems. They are too technical to give us concern at this point. It is sufficient to say that the infrequency of mention of the Church on the lips of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels is recognized in our day to be counterbalanced by the idea of a community which was to be produced out of his efforts.

It is to this community that we should now turn our attention. One of the recent movements in Biblical theology is a concentration upon the study of the nature of the Church. Such an interest was indicated some years ago in a book by R. Newton Flew, entitled Jesus and His Church. In this book Flew demonstrated that the infrequency of the term Church on the lips of Jesus is no proof that Jesus did not intend the Church. On the contrary, the fact that Jesus considered himself as Messiah, and that he intended to gather about himself a continuing community of people is evidence that he intended what is known in the New Testament as the Church. It is interesting that a little earlier Hort had written a book which he entitled The Christian Ecclesia. He explains that he chose the word ecclesia rather than Church because of the fact that the word Church has come to be associated with an ecclesiastical or a formal organizational pattern which has no counterpart in the New When we associate Hort's idea with the emphasis Testament setting. made by Flew in his work, we are brought immediately to the position which is stated in a little work by A. M. Hunter, The Message of the New Testament. In this book there is a chapter in which Hunter argues the necessity of concluding that Jesus intended the Church, based very largely upon the same reasoning which is to be found in the work by The work which was done by these men, as well as by many Flew. others whom it is not necessary to mention, has brought New Testament interpreters to a vital interest in the nature of the New Testament Church from the view point of the New Testament itself. It is possible

then for us to turn our attention, wholly in harmony with contemporary studies, to the question "When did the Church actually originate?"

We must recognize first of all that the Church did not begin suddenly, without any antecedent background or preparation. On the contrary it is necessary to view the Church in the light of its historical backgrounds in the Old Testament covenants. God's work among his people through Christ can be understood only by those who are fully aware of God's work with Abraham, his strivings with the Jewish people after the covenant at Mt. Sinai, and the work of the Hebrew prophets. All of these must be taken into consideration, because they throw light upon the way in which God deals with his people and upon the basic concepts which went into the development of the Church.

We must, on the other hand, recognize the Church's relationship to Jesus and especially to his resurrection. The constant association of the Church in the New Testament with the facts of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the prominent part which the resurrection plays, demonstrates that in some way the Church is a community which is related to those facts. The best conclusion seems to be that the Church as we know it in the New Testament came into existence after the resurrection of Jesus and on the Day of Pentecost which followed. This idea may be verified in an examination of the sermon of Peter on the Day of Pentecost and the results of that day's actions. The sermon began with a recounting of the great deeds which God had done through

Christ (Acts 2:22). These great deeds he had done in the midst of Israel and they had been manifest before all men. Furthermore, the death and the resurrection of Jesus was according to the plan and the foreknowledge of God. Whatever may have been the part of the Jews, the event was still God's mighty act in offering up of Christ and raising him from the dead, in order to make him publicly known to his people (Acts 2:32). Peter reached the climax of his sermon in the statement in Acts 2:36, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." An examination of the sermon as a whole demonstrates that the burden of Peter's message is the Messiahship, or if we will, the Lordship of Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God crucified and raised from the dead. Those in the tradition of the Restoration Movement need only to be reminded that this was the main impact which was characteristic of the preaching of Walter Scott. His book on the Messiahship is adequate evidence of this. Thus in the constitution of the Church there was first of all the Gospel of the great deeds which God had done in Christ both during his ministry and in his death, his resurrection, and his exaltation.

The next notation which Luke makes regarding this event is that of the response of the people. It seems so simple as to be almost inadequate for the situation. They believe the message which Peter has presented to them. Jesus is indeed the Christ who is God's son and

Savior. They are sinners and need God's salvation. Through Christ this salvation now is possible. It is this hope which lies back of their request. The question is simple and straightforward: "What must we do?" Here in a very brief statement is the recognition that man cannot find his peace with God unless he responds to God's offer, but the question which Peter answers in the question which relates not only to the matter of salvation but also to their fellowship with God. Thus in Acts 2:38 Peter answers simply, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

The implications of this answer of Peter are not worked out at this point but in the narrative which follows, we are told of those who responded to the invitation and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. We are told, further, that those who were so baptized were joined together in a fellowship of which at least part of the characteristics were the continuation in the Apostle's teaching, in the fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayer (Acts 2:42). We are told at the conclusion of the chapter (44, 45) that this group of people banded themselves together and had all things in common. Here again we come to this word "common" which indicates that it was a fellowship, a sharing, or a mutual possession. The underlying motive which drew them together was not some external force by which they were compelled to unite themselves, but an inner necessity which came from their faith

in Jesus as the Christ and their loyalty to him. It was this community born of faith in the resurrected Christ and of submission to him as Savior and Lord that concerns us. This community we know as the Church in the New Testament sense.

Such a survey as this indicates that the Church, in the first place, was born out of the preaching of the Gospel of the risen Chirst and out of the response of those who heard and believed. Immediately thereafter in the book of Acts we begin to hear of the Church. This ecclesia is the fellowship or the association which is the community of faith.

Our task now is to determine, so far as we can, what the nature of this community of faith, the Church is in its essential nature.

II. The nature of the Church as presented in the New Testament.

It would be possible for us to make various kinds of studies of the Church in the New Testament. In fact the possibilities are almost endless. The one which is most familiar is an historical study, which would be an examination of the development of the Church in the Book of Acts and of its problems as seen in the Epistles. The nature of our study, however, will make it profitable more for us to turn to an approach which will supplement the historical. We shall attempt in this part of our study to examine those figures of speech, or illustrations which are used to describe the nature of the Church. It will be necessary then to determine what the writer is attempting to convey to us through the

use of such a figure regarding the Church's nature. A word of caution must be stated here. No figure of speech is intended to be completely exhaustive. This means that in taking figures of speech such as those with which we shall deal, we are not to suppose that the figure is intended to exhaust the entire idea of the Church in the New Testament. Nor must we, on the other hand, suppose that the figure is to be taken literally. We must rather try to get the impression which the writer intends to convey to us and, by compiling these impressions, to learn what is the essential nature of the Church so far as the writers of the New Testament expressed it.

1. One of the figures of speech used in the New Testament to describe the Church is its presentation as the temple of the Holy Spirit. This figure is used in Eph. 2:19-21. Paul is discussing the problem of the unity and diversity within the Church as it relates especially to Jew and Gentile. The Jew had been a privileged individual and yet had not lived up to his heritage. The Gentile was an alien from God and was so far removed that he had no promise and was without hope and without God in the world. Yet a striking event had taken place. Christ, by his death on the cross, had drawn both Jew and Gentile to himself. By that death he had broken down the dividing wall that separated them, and had made of them one people. Having carried through this argument, Paul then seeks to illustrate the oneness which has now come to exist. Christians are members of God's household. They are fellow citizens with

the saints. The climactic statement is that they are a household of God. The nature of this household is that of a temple which is a living structure. It is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). Christ, who is this corner stone, the whole structure is joined together, This idea of being joined together emphasizes that the unity of the Church is no mere assoication of isolated individuals. It is a fellowship of people inseparably united in the one household. Furthermore the structure which is joined together in Christ, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. If Paul were being literal, this idea of growth would be absurd. But since he is seeking to illustrate the basic character of the Church, it is entirely in point. This is no temple of stone; it is a living temple of personalities or of individuals who willingly have responded to the invitation of God. So, from among Gentiles and Jews they are united into one fellowship and grow into such a union that it may be described as a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21). One of the striking things which Paul states about this temple is that it is built for the purpose of being a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Thus it is not a building without usefulness but it is the temple which God constructs out of those who respond to him and within which he comes to dwell among men (Eph. 2:21). This idea, then, of the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit is one of the most striking and one of the richest conceptions which is to be found in the New Testament.

This concept of a living temple which we have seen so vividly portrayed in Paul is found with equal force in I Peter, especially 2:5. Here again we need to survey the background. Peter is no stickler for consistency in figures of speech. He has discussed the way in which his readers have become Christians. Because they have been begotten anew they are to put away all of that which belonged to their old state of life. As new born babes they are to long for the pure spiritual milk so that they may grow up to salvation (I Pet. 2:2). Those who have been born into this new relationship are obviously a part of the family of God and yet this idea is not stressed. This we shall discuss later. What Peter does stress is that as children of God they come to him who is the living stone, that is to Christ, and as Christians are living stones built into a spiritual house (I Pet. 2:5). This concept of living stones and a spiritual house, if taken literally, would have very little value. but seen in the context in which Peter puts it, it becomes a dynamic concept. The Church is a living growing temple. Its stones are living personalities who are so thoroughly united with one another that they come to be joined in a living fellowship that makes up a spiritual house. We get from Paul (I Cor. 12:13) the idea that it is the Holy Spirit which fuses Christians into one people. We use the word "fuse" deliberately. It is not the joining of unlike particles in a conglomorate but the union of like persons into a fellowship which is so close and intimate that, while the individuality remains, each is so thoroughly subordinated to the total fellowship, that he finds the realization of his highest good

within the spiritual house which is the Church.

Such a temple as this, as we have already indicated, becomes the dwelling of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). It is difficult to say exactly what is meant by this statement, although it seems to be hinted at over and over again throughout the New Testament. Christians are told that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). At other places the Church itself is God's temple and God's Spirit dwells within it (I Cor. 3:16). This is true to such an extent that if anyone destroys the temple of God, that is the Church, him will God destroy. It seems very probably that this concept of the indwelling Spirit within the Church and the Church as the medium through which the Spirit of God finds its dwelling place among men, should be quite closely associated with Paul's discussions of the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22, 23. Here we are informed that that individual in whom the Spirit dwells or who walks by the Spirit will produce fruit which inevitably is part of his life. This fruit is love, joy, peace, etc. There can be no question about the nature of this fruit nor of the fact that it is a product of the Spirit of God and of man's response to that Spirit who dwells with him. The problem which Paul does not seek to solve, nor in fact do any of the writers of the New Testament, is this: To what extent does the Spirit of God dwell within the individual as an individual and to what extent does he dwell within the Church as the Church? It is doubtful whether such a question would have made sense to the writers of the New Testament.

be a Christian was to be within the Church, One, however, did not lose his identity. He found himself joined in a common community where his own personality was heightened and enriched by that belonging to every other. The Church when so joined together in this unity of fellowship becomes in truth the temple of God in the Spirit,

2. A second figure of speech is that of the Church as the family of God. This concept is implied in the teachings of Jesus concerning the fatherhood of God. When Jesus speaks of God as Father in the specific sense which he uses so often, he is referring to him as the Father of those who are like himself. This is implied in John 8:42 and elsewhere where he indicates that the Jews by their conduct demonstrate that they are not children of God. If they were children of God they would love even as God loves. This is similarly illustrated in the Sermon on the Mount in Mt. 5:43-48. Here Jesus indicates that we are to love one another, even to our enemies, for only when we do so shall we be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. This does not in itself necessarily imply the Church as a community, but does imply the characteristics of those who are assoicated with God in this part cular intimate way.

The idea of the Church as the family of God is further implied in the doctrine of the new birth. In John 3:3, 5 one finds his association in the kingdom of God only when he has undergone the birth of the water and the Spirit. A modified emphasis upon this theme is the figure of the death, burial, and resurrection as portrayed by Paul in Romans 6:1-4.

This idea is still further emphasized by the fact that Christians are known as brothers and sisters of one another. Thus they are members of God's household (Eph. 2:19). While this figure of speech is not used frequently, it still carries its implications throughout the New Testament. The whole of the eighth chapter of Romans is the description of what happens to that individual who has now been adopted into the family of God and thus becomes a child of God in the full and complete sense.

This intimate union is found only within that fellowship of the faith where men and women have surrendered themselves totally to the Lordship of Jesus, and have recognized that not only by creation but by the new creation they have become children of God. In this figure of speech the emphasis is upon the personal intimate union of believers together in the family of God. Each has access to God as his Father and so can pray without hindrance--"Our Father." But at the very moment that he prays thus he joins hands with every other believer who likewise prays, "Our Father." In so doing there is expressed that fellowship of faith which is in deed and in truth a close and loving fellowship which can be described in no lesser terms than that of family. We shall see later how this idea is elaborated in the fellowship at the Lord's table within the Church.

3. A third figure of speech which is much more familiar to us by contemporary reference is the idea of the Church as the body of Christ.

This is presented most completely in I Cor. 12:12ff. There is no need

to go into a detailed description of what Paul says here. He is dealing with the problem of the relationship of Christians within the Church at Corinth. There had been enmity and jealousy among them. Strife and faction had brought them to such a point that their fellowship was in danger of being severed. This breaking of fellowship had already manifested itself in the improper observance of the Lord's Supper and a failure to maintain a spirit of love. In order to correct this, Paul calls their attention to the fact that it is by one Spirit that they were all united in one body in Christ. In order to emphasize this idea he then uses the illustration of the Church as the body of Christ. He is so bold as to say in 12:12 "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ." We should notice that he does not say the Church is like a body. The implication is that the union between Christ and His Church is so intimate and close that while one may speak of Christ as the head of the Church, Paul goes even beyond this and speaks of Christ as the Church. Of course, he does not intend a specific identity. He intends only that the Christians at Corinth should face up to reality. When they were baptized into one body and partook of the one Spirit, whether they were Jews or Greeks, whether they were slaves or free, they became one in union with Christ, There should be no ground for severance.

A number of implications grow out of this idea. One of them is

that each member is united with Christ in an unbroken relationship so that he is as submissive to the will of Christ as the members of the body are submissive to the will of the body as a whole. A further implication is that each member of the body is united with every other member and that they live in union and coordination. Once they have entered into this relationship no member stands alone. Each has been brought into a living union in which every part of the body is equally valuable to the health and welfare of all. This idea similarly is expressed by Paul in Eph. 4:15, 16. The Church is here described as a body also. The individual members are to grow up into Christ who is the head. From him the whole body is, as Paul puts it, joined and knit together. The very points at which it is joined, give strength and life to the whole. Paul's conclusion is that when each part is working properly, there is bodily growth and the Church builds itself up in love. This is the ultimate purpose of the Church as the body of Christ. It must grow, because only as its growth is so guaranteed does it find the possibility of union with its living Lord. Incidentally, it may be remarked that the idea which Paul has expressed here is essentially the same as that of Jesus' allegory of the vine and the branches which he develops at considerable length in John 15. The implication of this whole concept is the idea of union and wholeness. There is no such thing as joining the Church. One is born into its fellowship. To be a member of the Church is to be as intimately and essentially a part of the Church as a hand or a foot or an eye is part of the body. It to as

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essential to a member of the Church that it should live in this fellowship as it is that the branch should remain in living union with the vine.

The idea of the union of Christians in fellowship with Christ would
undergo a rebirth of vitality if only we could recapture the dynamic of
this concept of the Church as the body of Christ or Jesus' concept of the
vine and the branches.

4. A fourth figure used to describe the Church is that of the Church as the bride of Christ. It is interesting that Jesus in Mark 2:19, 20 describes himself as the bridegroom in what may be an anticipation of this idea. John the Baptist uses the same term in John 3:29. However, the point at which the term "bride of Christ" becomes most realistic is in Paul's discussion in Eph. 5:21-32. It is introduced incidentally here. Paul is insisting that there must be a union of love, intimacy, and purity between husband and wife. In order to illustrate this he uses the relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for it. It is by his cleansing that he has sanctified her and cleansed her in order that she might appear before him in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The intent is that she may be holy and without blemish. Furthermore the love of Christ is such that he nourishes and cherishes the Church and does so even at the expense of his own life. Paul does not elaborate the figure of speech, probably because of the fact that it was assumed in the early Church. This evidently is why he can use it as illustration without undue explanation. First marries by God- There is too much levity about marriegemagnings has many spiritual caluse - Hey as needed.

The idea of the Church as the bride of Christ is climaxed in Rev. 21:2 when we read of the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband. Again in Rev. 19:7-9 the people of God are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb, Here in oriental imagery is the figure of the risen, living, glorified Christ who is finally united with his people. They, however, are no longer the persecuted poor and humble people who suffer through the tribulations of earth, but, purified from all of their sins and adorned by him who loves the Church, they appear once again as the bride who in all of her purity is presented before her husband. In this figure we get the implication of purity, intimacy, and beauty which is so strongly portrayed that, when we look at the Church about us and the Church in history, we feel ourselves almost afraid to use the figure. Yet Paul as well as John uses the figure without the least hesitation. One very interesting feature which is to be noted in relationship to the Church as the bride of Christ is that as the book of Revelation comes to a close (Rev. 22:17) the Spirit and the bride unite in the invitation to all men to come and to drink of the water of life. Here the Church in all of her beauty and glory as her Lord intends, and as she has been intended to be in every age, stands side by side with the Spirit of God and calls out to all the world to accept the glorious invitation to the marriage supper of the lamb, or as we may more accurately put it here, to come and drink of the water of life

upon which no price is set.

What do these figures of speech tell us about the nature of the Church? We may summarize quite readily. The idea of the unity of the Church runs through everyone of the figures. It is no superficial unity which is enforced from without nor one which can be broken easily by dissension from within but the personal union of a living temple, or of a family, or a body. There is also the idea of the intimate union between the Lord and his Church. Sometimes it is the union between God and the Church, sometimes between Christ and the Church, but always it is a living union in which the Church, or everyone within the Church, may find this fellowship of personal love and communion. Finally as the temple in which the Spirit of God dwells, or as the body of Christ, or as the bride who with the Spirit offers the invitation to eternal life, always the Church carries the message of the Lord to the world. No one can see the nature of the fellowship of the Church in the New Testament without being impressed with the tremendous imperative to evangelism and mission.

Thus our study of the fellowship of the faith has brought us to a survey of the implications involved in this new relationship between God and his people which staggers human imagination. It makes inadequate even the most exalted figures of speech. He who would come within the fellowship of the Church must come in all humility, realizing fully the significance of the statement of Paul, "What no eye has seen nor ear

who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit." (I Cor. 2:9).

Here in humble and worshipful submission, he who is a Christian bows

before his Lord in the fellowship of the faith, which is the Church.

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- 1. In view of the definition of the term "Fellowship" arrived at in Chapter I, what may we expect that the Church should be if it is a fellowship of believers in Christ? Discuss the implications of this in a practical contemporary situation.
- 2. Study Ephesians 2 and from the statements made there, discuss what the inter-racial and international attitude of the Church should be today. Is this attitude characteristic of the Church in America? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3. If the Church is the family of God, what should be the relationship of individuals who are in the Church? What should be their relationship to God? What practical measures could be taken to make this ideal a reality?
- 4. What does the idea of the Church as the body of Christ mean to you?

  If a congregation took seriously the teaching of Paul as he presents it
  in I Cor. 12:12ff. what are some of the practical results which would
  follow?
- 5. What impression do you receive from the idea of the Church as the bride of Christ? What problems does this present for the Church in our day? What can be done about these? In the light of this figure of speech, what can we expect the ultimate future of the Church to be?



#### THE FELLOWSHIP AND OUR ETERNAL HOPE

In previous discussions of fellowship with God we have left largely untouched the problem of the time when we may enjoy this fellowship. There have been different approaches to this particular problem and the answers have been widely divergent. So different have they been that the Church has sometimes been split asunder over the question as to when fellowship with God may ultimately be achieved.

One of the views is that our fellowship with God, in terms which we have described it, is wholly future. Participation in the kingdom of God and fellowship with God is one and the same thing. A real fellowship such as that which we have described is possible only when death has passed and we live in eternity with God. Or possibly it may take the form that the return of the Lord will inaugurate this unbroken fellowship and then the kingdom of God will be a reality.

Another view has been that this fellowship with God is something which is for the present time only. It is a living present relationship. We are not to be concerned about the future status of our relationship with him. We know nothing about it nor should we be concerned with predicting anything about it. God is with us in the Spirit wherever Christ is present, and thus we have this fellowship with God here and now.

Still others have found neither of these views entirely compatible

with the Biblical presentation. They have sought to combine the ideas. When this is done fellowship with God becomes an eternal and unbroken relationship between God and his people. It is something which may be enjoyed at the present time and yet it does not reach its ultimate fulfilment and glory in the present world. Such fulfilment must await the time of the final union between God and his people. It is with these subjects that we shall concern ourselves in this discussion. We must examine various approaches from a Biblical point of view and seek to find what is the teaching of the Scripture about the hope which belongs to our Christian faith.

# I. The fellowship of faith at the Lord's table.

When we seek to understand the nature of our hope and our eternal fellowship with God, we are helped greatly by looking at one of the ordinances of the Church which seeks to embody in its richest form, this eternal hope. This is the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. Basically the Lord's Supper is a very simple ceremony. It is simply the breaking of the bread and drinking from the cup within the religious community. It has, however, such a broad context that these simple forms take on tremendous significance. The Lord's Supper must be seen in the light, first of all, of the last supper which Jesus ate with his disciples. Here he did very much the same thing which the Church does in its ritual. In the midst of the last meal which he ate with his disciples, he took the bread and broke it and gave to each of them. He then passed

among them the cup from which each was to drink. The setting, however, in which he did this, gave to it significance far beyond the simple ceremony. Whether or not this was the Passover meal, the idea certainly was related to the Passover event. Jesus must in some way have been associating himself with the Passover lamb which was slain for Israel in ancient days, the blood of which was sprinkled on the door posts and on the gates of the houses of Israel. That blood meant their deliverance from the death angel as it passed over to strike at the households of Egypt. There is reason also to think that Jesus was here identifying himself with the suffering servant of the 53rd chapter of Isaiah who was bruised and broken in order that he might bring redemption to his people. This supper was instituted on the night in which Jesus was betrayed into the hands of his enemies. The next day he was nailed to the cross and there, poured out his life as his body was wracked on the cross and as his life ebbed away in the flowing of the blood from his pierced hands and feet and the wound in his side. It was in the light of this that the disciples came to understand the Lord's Supper.

Another factor which we must take into consideration in understanding the Lord's Supper is that is was observed by the early Church especially on the Lord's Day. This was the day of the resurrection. The Christian community assembled itself together in worship on that day of the week on which their Lord was raised from the dead. Once again they broke the bread which he had taught them to break and they

drank from the cup as he had taught them. This became a continuing ritual with tremendously deep significance in the life of the Church. It is only as we see the Lord's Supper against this Old Testament background, against the background of the events of the crucifixion, and finally against the resurrection itself that it comes to have its true significance for us.

For the Church, the Lord's Supper was a fellowship meal which had significance even beyond their power to comprehend. In the first place, it was a recognition on the part of every individual who participated, that Christ had died for him. Thus as he ate from the bread and drank from the cup he not only remembered but recognized with deep penitence that it was for him that the body of Christ had been nailed to the cross and that his blood had been poured out in death. In this way the Lord's Supper became a rite of penitence in which each individual recognized his own sinfulness and his need of forgiveness. In the light of the cross he saw the cost of his own sin.

Secondly the Lord's Supper came to the Christian as a sign of the forgiveness which God brings. There would be little point in reminding the individual that he was a sinner and that his sin had made necessary the death of Christ, if at the same moment and with the same bread and cup he were not made to realize that here was God's gift of the assurance of his forgiveness. Just as surely as in the days of old, God placed a rainbow in the heavens to signify to Noah that he would not again destroy

the earth by water, so does he place in the hands of the penitent Christian the cup and loaf as the sign that his sins are forgiven. They are removed from him as far as the east is from the west. They are remembered no more. He is a forgiven child of God.

A third element of significance in the Lord's Supper is that of fellowship with the living Christ. Here is not simply a memorial of one who died centuries ago but a fellowship meal with one who lives and is among his people. Just as surely as the disciples on the night of the last supper ate and drank with the Christ, so does the Christian eat and drink with Christ in the act of the Lord's Supper. Just as surely as the two men in Emmaus had their eyes opened and knew the risen Christ in the breaking of the bread, so surely does the Christian know the presence of the living Christ among his people. This rite, however, is no individual sort of thing. Just as one eats and drinks with Christ so does he eat and drink with his fellow Christian, for he who reaches forth his hand to take the bread and the cup, recognizes that he does so in communion with his living Lord. Just so does he recognize that he eats and drinks with his Christian brother who is by his side. The Church thus becomes the family of God as they sit at the Lord's table and the bonds of union, love, and fellowship are drawn more and more closely as the Church worships in the service of the Lord's Supper.

Finally the Lord's Supper signifies, as Paul indicates to us in I Cor. 11:26, that as the Church partakes, it shows forth the Lord's death

till he comes. In this sense the Lord's Supper is not a remembrance but an anticipation. The Church longingly looks forward to that day when her Lord will stand in her midst, not only as the spiritual Christ who comes among them in worship, but the one who comes again in all his glory and power to bring to consummation the history of the ages. The Lord's Supper is the foretaste of the marriage supper of the lamb. With all of these features, the Lord's Supper than becomes the living symbol of the fellowship of the Church and the embodiment of her eternal hope.

# II. The Christian now has fellowship with Christ.

The Scripture makes it quite clear to us that we need not wait until after death to enter into a living and active fellowship with our Lord. This is implied in various ways. Peculiarly it appears in the way in which we become a Christian. There is no point here in discussing the rite of baptism, although we should recall that in that act, when properly associated with faith and penitence and the consequent union with Christ, we are born into a new family, or are resurrected into a new life. All of this is conceived as union with Christ. In fact Paul in Gal. 3:27 says specifically that we are baptized into Christ. He is concerned here to point out that the person who has become a Christian has entered into a present, living relationship with his Christ.

The idea of new life with God is implied, however, in various places in the New Testament. For example in I John 3:14 we are told that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren.

Here the love of the brethren certainly indicates an active fellowship within the Christian community. That fellowship and love which is involved in it is a demonstration of the fact that while we were once dead we now live. Again in John 6:35, 47 we are told that he who comes to Jesus and believes in him has eternal life. This is not the promise of some far off future glory which could possibly be achieved, but it is the pronouncement of the Christ who himself declares that that person who believes in him has in reality entered into a new life which is life eter-An even more striking statement is to be found in John 11:25, 26. Jesus had come to Bethany where Lazarus, his friend, had died. Martha confronted him with the statement that if only he had been there Lazarus would not have died. She went further to say that even now she knows that whatever he asks of God, God will do it for him. Jesus responded to the statement of Martha with an apparently puzzling assertion. It is the statement, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. " Apparently Martha was confused by this statement, for when Jesus asked her whether or not she believed it, her only response was "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God." Her answer indicates that she does not understand. She knows that in the resurrection Lazarus will come forth from the tomb. does not understand how one who lives shall never die. She believes only in Jesus who is the Christ, the Son of God. For her this is sufficient. We, on the other hand, are confronted with the conviction that

Jesus declares possible a fellowship with him within the family of God, which is eternal life here and now. This same conviction is in the mind of Paul as he writes in Col. 1:13 that those who are Christians have been delivered out of the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of God's beloved Son. Here is no future glory yet to be achieved. It is a present, living reality. Certainly then, if this fellowship means what these passages indicate, we must recognize that eternal life is not only a possibility but is a present reality for every Christian.

A different way of saying a similar thing is to be found in two terms which are very frequently used by the Apostle Paul. One of these is the term, "in Christ." Apparently without any sense of contradiction Paul uses also the idea that Christ lives within the Christian. idea is developed by Paul in various places. In Gal. 2:20 Paul declares that he has been crucified with Christ. The tense of the verb here is of significance. Paul uses the Greek perfect. The tense signifies that the thing about which he is speaking is a present reality which is a result of past action. To put it another way, Paul is simply saying, "On one occasion I suffered crucifixion with Christ. All that I now am is a result of that crucifixion experience." Without doubt Paul is referring to his own conversion, and probably to his conversion as climaxed in his This is confirmed by the parallel which can be drawn in Romans 6:1-4. In this passage baptism is portrayed as a death with Christ, a burial with Christ, and a resurrection with Christ. Thus the

conversion experience has such tremendous significance that the individual lives now as if he had never really lived before but had been resurrected to new life.

This tremendous result is suggested by Paul also in Gal. 2:20. Immediately after he makes the statement that he has been crucified with Christ, he asserts that it is no longer he who lives. It is Christ who lives in him. Paul is not boasting that he is living a peculiar kind of life. He rather is humbly recognizing that if he lives up to the possibilities of his conversion, or even as he seeks to do so, he becomes the instrument of Christ. What he speaks will not be of his will but it must be subordinated wholly to the will of Christ. His hands must do the work of Christ. His feet must walk in Christ's way. He is Christ's man and there can be no reservations.

This idea very probably can not be distinguished from that of the indwelling of the Spirit in the Christian as is seen in various places. For example in I Cor. 3:16 the Church is God's temple. In I Cor. 6:19 the body of the Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit. In Gal. 5:22-25 the Christian walks by the Spirit and the Spirit dwelling within him produces in his life the fruit of the Spirit.

One who lives in this way is described in various ways. In Romans 8:1 he is said to be in Christ. In Romans 8:10 it is Christ who dwells in him. In Romans 8:14-17 such persons are sons of God. They are fellow heirs with Christ.

The reality of this relationship may not yet appear, but that it is a possibility and in fact that it ultimately will come to pass, is confirmed by the convicition expressed in I John 3:2, "We are God's children now; but it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Thus the indwelling Christ produces a fellowship in which eternal life is a present reality and awaits only the unfolding of eternal life which is yet to be.

A third feature which lends strength to this idea of a present fellowship with God, is the continuing emphasis throughout the New Testament upon the fact that the living Christ is among his people. The statement in the great commission (Mt. 28:20) is the first statement of this nature. Here the disciples, and apparently along with them the Church, are sent out into the world to make disciples of all nations. On condition that they fulfill this commission, Christ promises that he will be with them even to the end of the age. This is no mere figure of speech. If it were so it would give no encouragement nor would it have meaning in its context. Chirst actually promises that he will be among his people and that his presence will go with them even to the end of the age. We have already seen the import of this idea of the living Christ in the Lord's Supper and we need not discuss it further here.

This idea of the living Christ among his people is probably most vividly portrayed in the opening chapters of the Book of Revelation. Here there are, of course, some questions of interpretation but none

which should cause difficulty for the point under discussion. exiled to the Isle of Patmos, hears behind him a voice. As he turns, he sees one walking among the seven lamp stands. This one is clothed with a long robe and a golden girdle. His head and his hair are white as white wool like snow, and his eyes like a flame of fire. His feet are like burnished bronze and the sound of his voice is like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he holds seven stars and out of his mouth issues a sharp two-edged sword. Above all, his face is like the sun shining in full strength (Rev. 1:12-16). Here John catches his first vision of the risen, glorified Christ. It is of importance to note that John does not describe this vision as in heaven. He stands firmly upon the Isle of Patmos. It is an experience which takes place on the plane of human life. The glorified Christ walks among the seven golden lamp stands. In verse 20 these seven golden lamp stands are identified as the seven churches of Asia. This has tremendous significance for our thought here. The living Christ is not simply that one who sits at the right hand of the Father but the one who walks among the lamp stands, that is, he walks and lives among his churches. This figure is clarified further by the content of the letters which he writes to the seven churches. In at least eight places within the seven letters the Christ in writing to the churches uses the expression, "I know" (2:2, 3, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). The things which he knows are interesting. He knows their works, their toil, their patient endurance. He knows their tribulation and poverty. He knows that they dwell where Satan's throne is.

knows their faith and their love. He knows that they are dead although they have a name that they live. He knows the works which they still do in the midst of a trying situation. He knows their indifference, because they are neither hot nor cold. A careful examination of the seven letters will show that the Christ who sends the letters to the seven churches speaks of intimate and present details which are so clear and so incisive that no one except a person intimately acquainted with the churches could have written the letters. The implication of this whole vision is that the living Christ is no stranger to his people. His presence is a guarantee of his love. Those who must be chastened, he chastens. Those who need encouragement, he encourages. In suffering he gives comfort; in labor he gives strength; above all, he promises victory. Thus he stands among the churches exactly as he has promised that he would stand when he gave the great commission to his disciples. It certainly is not too much to say that if the concept of fellowship about which we have spoken is true, then the living risen Christ walks among his churches in our day. Whether it be behind the iron curtain or the bamboo curtain, whether it be on the mission field or across the tracks, whether the down town church or the suburban church or even the village and the hamlet of our day, the Lord lives and walks among his churches, and his very presence gives strength and sustenance to a church that could not live without him. In this is the promise of ultimate victory whatever may happen in our day and time.

From these illustrations, selected from several that could be

given from the pages of the New Testament, it seems unquestionably clear that the New Testament Church believed that this fellowship with Christ could be, and in fact was, as real as the fellowship which it would share with him in its eternal glory. Whether the Christian was at the communion table, or at work at his task, or on the widespread mission areas of the Church, the Christ was there, and in the presence of the living Christ, they knew that their fellowship had that character of the eternal which assured them that they would live forever.

### III. The Church lives with a view to the future.

All that we have said does not in any way negate the fact that the Church always anticipated a future reunion with her Lord. There is no need here to enter into the controversial question of a millenium. With this we are not concerned. Whether Christ comes in order to establish the golden age or whether the golden age is ushered in by the Church which makes ready the coming of her Lord is not the question. The Church always looks forward to his coming again if she is true to her basic heritage. We are concerned particularly with the truths which underly this forward look, rather than the theories which have sought to clarify but have often confused it.

The Church has always lived with the assurance that when Christ rose from the dead he overcame death. This did not mean that death was immediately vanquished. Even his disciples were clearly aware of this. Although they are confident that he was raised from the dead and

that they also would share in his resurrection, they knew that this victory had not yet been fully realized. There were many, however, who were very slow to realize that the struggle between Christ and the forces of evil which he would ultimately destroy, might be a long one. In I and II Thess, this problem arises acutely and Paul finds that he must temper the hopes and aspirations of the Christians who thought Christ was soon to return. In I Cor. 15 we learn of those who felt that since Christ had delayed his coming and Christians had died, there would be no resurrection of the dead, even though he had been raised. Thus the problem was not an easy one.

It was certain to the Church, on the other hand, that the victory of Christ on the cross had guaranteed the final outcome. In Eph. 4:8 we read that at his resurrection he ascended on high and led a host of captives. In Col. 2:15 we are told that "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made public example of them triumphing over them in him." I Cor. 15:20ff is Paul's triumphal song of the certainty of the final victory of Christ over death.

This certainty of the Church that Christ had overcome death and would raise his people from the dead is not the Church's only hope, however. There was a conviction equally strong that Christ would ultimately put down all those who oppose his righteous will. We read the triumphant song of the mighty angel in Rev. 11:15 that the kingdom of the world had become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ and he

would reign for ever and ever. The pouring out of the plagues upon the earth, the destruction of the beasts, and finally the overthrow of the city Babylon are demonstrations that the Christ will overcome evil. There are still more vivid figures than these. In Rev. 14:14-16 we read of one like a son of man who sits upon a cloud with a sickle in his hand ready to thrust the sickle in the harvest. That harvest would be the judgment of all things. An even stronger figure is found in Rev. 19:11-16. Here is the figure of the champion on a white horse riding forth conquering and to conquer. His garments are sprinkled with the blood of the victims he has conquered. His eyes are like a flame of fire. On his head are many diadems and his name is the Word of God. Following him in glorious array are the armies of heaven clothed in pure white linen riding on white horses. Those who have not subjected themselves to his will will be smitten as with a rod of iron, because the wine press of the fury of God's wrath must press its vengeance. But to those who are his people there will come glory and honor.

The glorious climax of this picture is to be seen in Rev. 21 as John sees a new heaven and a new earth emerging because the first heaven had passed away. He sees "the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2). Furthermore, in verse 9 there is the invitation to John to see the wife who is the bride of the lamb. This is followed by a word picture of incomparable beauty in which the New Jerusalem, the people of God, is described in terms which impoverishes human

language. John seeks to portray in the words of human language the heavenly Jerusalem which is beyond all possibility of human description. Here is the union of God and his people. The city of God shines with the brilliance far beyond that of sun or of moon, for the glory of God is the light by which it is illumined. Both the nations and the kings of the earth walk by that light and they bring their glory into it. The gates are always open and only that which is clean and holy shall enter into it (21:22-27). John's description of heaven as the place where the river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the lamb is one which stands as a classic in all language (Rev. 22:1-5). Here is fully realized the unbroken fellowship between God and his people. They are refreshed from the water of life and they eat without hindrance from the tree whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. No longer is there curse or evil. There can be no tear nor sorrow for God shall wipe away the tears from every eye and through an eternal reign the Lord God will be the light of his people, because their fellowship with him will be unbroken throughout all eternity.

This is a glimpse of the final and eternal fellowship which the people of God will find with him who is their heavenly Father. This is the hope of the Church and it is to this hope that the Church looks forward as she eats from the broken bread and drinks from the cup, and thus shows forth her Lord's death till he comes.

### CONCLUSION

We are now prepared to raise the question of the implications which this concept of fellowship in the life of the Church can have for our day. At various points, of course, we have drawn implications, but there are certain facts which seem to stand out.

In the first place this concept of fellowship has great importance for the unity of the Church. If the fellowship is what we have concluded it to be, it must be the union of individuals with Christ and of individuals with one another. They are drawn together into a unity which is the Church. It may be described in various terms as we have seen, and express itself in various activities. Just how this unity of the fellowship is to be achieved in our contemporary world is a practical matter which will demand great insight, prayer, and patience, but the fact that such a unity was a living reality in the first century and that it gave such tremendous dynamic to the first century Church, should inspire us to such an effort that we let nothing stand in our way.

A second implication involved in this concept of fellowship is that which applies to our personal religious faith. What is Christianity?

It is no mere attendance at Church, nor mere morality, nor is it any one of the many things which are marked off as characterizing a person as religious. On the other hand, it is not mere negativism in which one is a Christian because he does not believe or because he does not do

certain things. Christianity is a living personal relationship with Christ. This is symbolized in his surrender to Christ in his conversion and is made real in the indwelling presence of the Spirit of God within him. It comes to action in his association with his fellow Christians. No one therefore stands alone as a Christian. He stands always within the fellowship of the Christian community. The richness of one's Christian life is to be realized in the fellowship of love and service which finds its example in the Church's Lord. It was not without deep insight that our Lord stated that all men would know that his followers were his disciples by the fact that they loved one another even as he had loved them (John 13:34, 35).

A third implication relates to the work of the Church in our troubled world. We often wonder whether the Church can survive a world threatened by Communism. The history of the Church leads us, however, to be more concerned whether the Church has the internal stamina to live up to its possibilities, than to attempt to evaluate the opposition from the outside. There were two factors which made the early Church the dynamic movement which it was. The first of these was the fact that each Christian had a loyalty to his Lord which meant more than life itself. He would serve that Lord at any cost. Secondly, the Christian was convinced that he was participating in a cause which could not be defeated. It was God's cause. It must overcome the world. Thus he did not count numbers on his side nor did he count the years which it would take to accomplish the purpose. These things were in God's

hands. The cause of Christ demanded his all and promised to him that his life, though lost in the struggle, was not in vain. It was a winning cause and in that he could lose himself. Thus this fellowship found expression in the conviction that with loyalty to a living Lord who was Jesus the Christ, and participation in the cause of God expressed especially in the Church, it had found that for which man was created. If in our day Christians could recapture these two great convictions and embody them in the fellowship of the Church, it would again become the dynamic factor in the world that it was in the first three centuries. It is this to which each of us is called to pledge himself. We must be convinced of the Lordship of Christ. To him we must repledge ourselves in loyalty. We must, with this loyalty, be convinced of the invincibility of his cause. Once we have come to this conviction, the words of John will be the conviction of our life, "This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (I John 5:4).

### STUDY QUESTIONS

- What different ideas do you find presented in the Lord's Supper?
  If these have been lost in its observance, what can be done to recapture them?
- 2. What does Paul mean by being "in Christ"? Does this differ from his idea of "Christ in me"? What importance can these ideas have for our daily living?
- 3. Do you think Christians would act any differently if they believed

that Christ were actually present among them? If so, what would the difference ba?

- 4. What value is there in the hope of the Church that Christ will return?

  What dangers are there in the expectation of an immediate return?
- 5. What has the eternal hope of the Church contributed to her success?

  How can this be made valuable in our day.

#### NOTES

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